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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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* Illustrations by C. Sivaramamurti.
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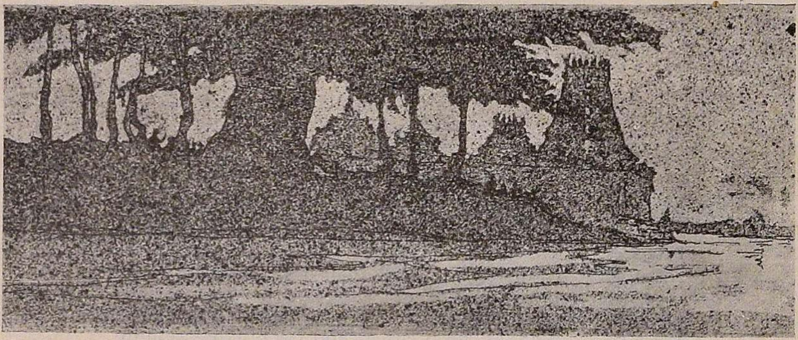
TO OUR READERS

We have many story-writers about us but we very rarely get a good story. A year that publishes one first-rate story is indeed a great literary year; but for stories in India there are more lean years than leap years. Maybe there are vernacular magazines, sound on the fictional side, but all this talk of writing in one's vernacular only hides beneath it the desire for a larger and freer expression in English. English has come to stay; the genius of the language is its extreme resilience, its remarkable economy in the use of words to create a telling effect, to make an epic idea most clear and articulate. Nearly all of the younger generation in our land have chosen English as their medium of expression; they are not in the dusty rear, however much their elders try to thrust them back, but in the forefront of present-day thought. And in recent years, the short story as literature has achieved a glow and vitality unequalled by any other literary form. We start THE SHORT STORY which is devoted exclusively to fiction to discover writers who are denied publication elsewhere, to bring them know one another, and to encourage them towards perfecting the form they have adopted; and so long as the story has the highkick which a sound sculpture gives it, we don't care a rap whether its author is in the limelight, twilight, or gloom. We shall be funny, we shall be merry, we shall be serious too; through our stories will shine the Comic Spirit hiding in her core the crystal well of tears. The hurlyburly of the hours, we have in the shrill headlines of the daily newspapers; THE SHORT STORY will be concerned with Life in its more enduring values. For Life is lifeful; Death is deathy; and if we die our life will have made our death memorable.



'The Akanda Cauvery, a mile broad and majestic, in her fullest hour of flood.'

A FRACTURED ARM

By K. S. VENKATARAMANI

K KRISHNASWAMI had once high hopes of a brilliant career in life either as an I. C. S. or as a successful leader of the Madras Bar who gathered his rupees in shoals in sunshine and in storm. There were five Krishnaswamis in the S. S. L. C. Class but S. T. was easily the best. And he was the top boy from From I to VI in the High School at Trichinopoly but suffered a strange eclipse of academic fortune in his college career.

They say wiving goes by destiny. But in Kittu's case, surely, destiny went by wiving. It proved a frost to the bud. Ever since he strode in bridal procession, his saffroned hand clasped in another delicate rosy hand, he suffered a strange paralysis. His interest in studies slackened. His juvenile outlook lost its vigour and abundance. His vitality became scattered. Did this lassitude arise from a romantic revolt and longing that surges the juvenile bosom with tumultuous joy at the prospect of a distant but sure fulfilment? No; for, Kittu felt no attraction for this inscrutable business of marriage, a confused affair of human muddling, and viewed it with an alert tremor as a tiger would a torchlight. Kittu was anti-feminine by birth, shaded deeper by the vivid touch of heredity and the misanthropic influence of his proud grandmother.

Kittu failed in the Intermediate Examination partly due to the decay that had already set in because of his marriage and partly because Trichinopoly happened to be one of the "slaughtered" centres. The sensitive lad who tasted failure for the first time sold his text-books and empty bottles that once contained Dr Rao's tonics to brace him up for the midnight studies, scraped together the train fare to Paramati, his own sylvan village on the banks of the Akanda Cauvery.

Kittu decided to have no more dealings with man or woman, boy or girl, but live a life utterly one

with Nature. He indeed lived such a life but one exception he made in favour of his aged but virile and active grandmother. Who would not who knew the amazing talents of Seshi, the terror of the village and the born tamer of daughters-in-law ? Kittu's wife, Kamalam, fair and pure as a lotus-bud, joined Kittu more as a subject to give name and fame to Seshi's imperial rule and as a kitchen-wench to the drudgery of a home which had its own stylish traditions of living.

Immediately after his marriage Kittu lost his parents within one month of each other and this aggravated Kamalam's future. Ever since, Seshi looked upon Kamalam as a bird of ill-omen, and Kittu's own temperament favoured the view that marriage was a clumsy contrivance of man for the reproduction of his own silly species : nay, all animal life has bungled this vital affair compared with the sovereign simplicity of the vegetable kingdom in this matter. Naturally Seshi sympathised with Kittu who inherited from her in a large measure this misanthropic, you may call, but scientific view of life.

2

While Kittu was thus leading more than two years of his sterile life in his own beautiful and fertile village, and Kamalam drudged as a kitchen-slave to the whipping tongue of her mother-in-law's mother-in-law a national event cast its shadow, or sunshine, if you please, on Kittu's destiny even in secluded Paramati. The Government of India, under the stress of Congress agitation, was becoming more and more alive to the needs of mass education. They stimulated by a well-worded circular the sleeping provincial governments which in turn whipped up the Taluq Boards who were till then spending lavishly their money on mending their village roads which could never be mended so long as contractors for earthwork were drawn from the expert class of brothers and cousins, brothers-in-law and cousins-in-law of Presidents of Taluq Boards and members thereof. From mending roads they were now asked to mend boys which they took up with equal promptitude.

The Taluq Board under whose jurisdiction Kittu lived finally selected three dozen villages for opening up new primary schools and spending the allotment of money that came to them suddenly like flood in the Cauvery. Paramati happened to be one of the chosen three dozens.

Kittu's married life was unblessed and Kamalam's prayerful temperament continued to pray and work, and work and pray. Like all people who have not succeeded in reproducing their selves Kittu felt no tenderness or love for the young, but felt a very great attraction, a strange fascination, to become a teacher of the young. And in those archaic days birth-control had not yet become a live or fashionable topic to engross the attention of the over-prolific and the sterile.

The fruitless is generally of two classes, the loving and the misanthropic. To the first, the touch and sight of the young, the tender young, is a soothing balm to the bruised heart that longs in vain for its own reproduction,—the mother of instincts. The second looks upon the young with cannibal eyes and longs to be a teacher so that it may bury its nails in the warm young flesh even as a jutka driver looks upon the newest colt with a merciless whip in hand. Kittu belonged to the second class. Why deride poor Kittu ? He's not to blame. Nature rejoices in exceeding variety and society manures and waters only the tares and the weeds.

Kittu was appointed a primary school teacher at Paramati on rupees twelve a month. The prospective clang of silver pieces in his purse humanised him for a while, and he indeed liked the job for a few months, and then carried it on as a matter of stern duty with increasing severity towards the hapless young, day by day, for over three years. And of late he was becoming more and more irregular even in attendance. But his cane, the symbol of his despotic power, lay on the table, long and severe, all the twenty-four hours of the day.

Kittu was a little brute to the young and sensitive lads trembled like aspen leaves at mere sight of him or sound of his tread. Their hearts sank in twitching pain. Did their parents know? Yes, they did, but were callous because of the age-long tradition. But all were too busy with their own work, and both father and mother were happy that the mischievous imps had been well impounded for the day and domestic peace was insured.

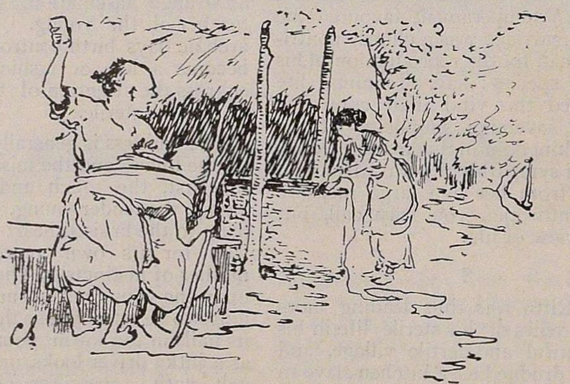
3

'Mother,'—so Kittu called his grandmother,—'I am dead tired of this wretched slaving work day by day saying the same silly little things to little boys who could or would never learn; it's like pouring water on stone, it'll never wet; or to use a biblical saying (he had emerged out of the Mission School at Trichinopoly with a good knowledge of the Scripture): cast the seed on rocky soil, it'll never sprout.'

'Kittu,' energetically replied Seshi, alarmed at the prospect of losing the twelve silver pieces a month, 'what is the use of wailing in this world? Take things Kittu, as they are, and it is hard work for all of us. Look at me. Even at eighty-five I've to work hard, getting up at five, and Kamalam comes out of her bed at seven, like a queen. Again, why complain against poor little boys meant for play? Look at Kamalam, your own wife. She's as old as that rain-washed mud-wall in our backyard and as wise as that. I am telling her every day to do this and to do that—and she will never learn even the routine. She is a teacher's wife—I am not surprised your little boys are no better.'

'Yes, yes, mother, I understand your hint. The teacher is stupid, worthless, he does not know his job—can't teach.' The brute in brute Kittu was stirred, and it required very little stirring, by the effective insinuating way of his grandmother. Kittu had a silver tumbler in his hand, a marriage present from Kamalam, out of which he was slowly drinking buttermilk.

He flung it in a rage at Kamalam who just then happened to be drawing water from the well in the courtyard. In that helpless condition, the silver cup struck her at the gentlest part of her bosom, spilling the buttermilk into streaming drops, and then it fell into the well gurgling water and sank to the bottom mire. Kittu followed his clever bowling with words of abuse which he had well enriched since he became a teacher.



'He flung it in a rage at Kamalam.'

Seshi made her own little contribution to the drama. In petulant ire she suggested that Kamalam herself should leap into the well and salvage the silver cup. Kamalam, bearing with patience the ill-treatment of years, caught the hint in a suppressed suicidal rage she had been feeling for long and suddenly leapt into the well.

Kittu screamed in horror at the unexpected turn and even Seshi was taken aback by the loyalty of her daughter-

in-law to her suggestions. The whole village was soon upon the scene and it included the troop of boys from Kittu's own school who were not a whit less eager to see their teacher's wife drowned in the well though they would have liked most heartily Kittu himself at the bottom of the well.

4

At about the same time, though it fell within regular school hours, another scene was enacted in this village drama in the dilapidated house in which the school was located. The boys had met in open revolt. For, that day, Kittu had overdone the usual exercise of his cane over the boys. Of late, he had grown into a settled habit of using his cane immediately on arrival as a disciplinary and preventive punishment, a measure to ensure order even during his dozing hours at noon. The whole of the previous week the boys had conspired to put an end to this tyranny. They resolved to break cocoanuts and burn camphor to the village god Ganesha that some dire calamity might happen to their teacher, that his merciless caning right hand might break its bones in some street accident. They carried out the resolve but still their prayers remained unheard.

'Comrades, what is the use of praying to god Ganesha who is as helpless as little boys who sometimes stone him in play?' cried one who was more practical and realistic than the others. 'Let us pull together and act. Waylay Kittu when he goes out in the evenings, stone him from bush and tree till he carries his caning right hand in a sling for ever.'

An applause greeted this speech.

'No, no. Let us be brave boys. Why should we pursue our teacher in the dark? Let us pelt him with paper balls and balloons charged with ink, or drive nails and pins into his seat, or let loose crackers when he snores on the bench,' suggested another who objected to change the venue for their revenge from the school rooms to the roads.

'Or if he dare to cane us for our paper balls, let us pull out the cane from his hand,' suggested another affecting keen foresight.

'Comrades, hear me,' cried the tallest and the most forward boy in the school. 'These things are easily said but not so easily done. There is one clear way. Let us all one day strike work, lock the door against our teacher quietly when he is snoring on the bench. Why, my boys, one day? Why not even now, when he is away?'

This suggestion was approved by a hilarious roar of applause, and in fact one boy already produced a small lock from his pocket. But by common consent Kittu's own lock was preferred. So the simmering revolt of the young duly boiled over into an executive act of precocious courage and decision.

Hardly had the boys locked the door and crowded on the verandah when the news reached them that their teacher's wife had jumped into a well. So they trooped along to sight the glory and only wished on the way that it might be he and not she.

As the well was broad and shallow, and Kamalam was lean, lithe, and agile, she shot down like an arrow even in the dangerous descent of twenty feet. She escaped with a few bruises on the head and the feet. The will to live guides us secretly even in the most explosive and suicidal hour.

At about the same time, by some providential chance, the President of the Taluq Board arrived on a casual visit of inspection both of his dilapidated schools and roads.

And Kittu was unveiled.

5

The schoolmaster understood before sunset that after this demoralising incident he could no more remain in his village with a shred of self-respect and planned an escape to Madras to drown his rural shame in urban vastness and ugliness where Kittu, the tyrant, would not be known or recognised. And he, with surprising zeal and industry thought of and tried to secure several jobs in the metropolis. Eventually he found that only two careers were open to a

Brahmin, that of a cook or a chauffeur, for both of which, of course, he required a preliminary training. No whilom teacher ever thinks of becoming a cook. So Kittu tried his apprentice hand at motor driving, adding terribly to the perils of pedestrian traffic in Madras. He was sure that his teaching hand which wielded the cane so effectively was at least equally good at the wheel.

Kittu in the first month of his apprenticeship "back-fired" one day and nearly broke his right hand which was badly sprained at the wrist. In the second month of his learning he showed much greater promise. He was allowed his stray trials out. Encouraged by the proficiency and control he was gaining in his new art so quickly, he landed his beautiful Austin Sedan upside down one day at racing speed against a tamarind tree on the wayside, the tree whose buoyant little branch he had so often and so intimately used against the tender palm and flesh of his boys. He smashed the Sedan, smashed the ulna and radius of his own right hand. He had a nasty bleeding cut on the head and contracted on the third day high fever and wavered between life and death for a day in the Madras General Hospital.

But Kittu had a line in the newspapers about the accident and a photograph of the smash. He read it with some joy even in high fever. Kittu had the soul of the publicist and the politician and had his own share of love of glory, for all his misanthropy, a human failing that lives in the very red corpuscles of the blood.

6

'Kamala, how shall I ever fully express my remorse, work out my repentance and wash the hate of years with acts of love?' Kittu pleaded in a voice of entreaty to his wife, a voice to which youth, love, and sincerity alike had returned as if by magic.

'Why should you, dear? You are always my privileged lord. Love as well as hate is the same to me at your hands.' Kamalam spoke with ease and refinement in the subdued accents of a true Hindu wife.

It was the third week after the accident. It was a clean bed in the General Hospital and Kittu lay therein with his fractured arm heavily padded with bandage and floating in a sling. Kamalam was by his bed-side nursing him with unceasing toil and devotion. Since Kittu broke his arm he was a changed man. The motor smash had smashed his past. Three weeks of nursing with loving care conquered in him all hate of his wife and her sex.

'Kamala, I have been very hard on you these years, indeed cruel. I was a little brute. I never knew you were so full of love for me even then. It was my grandmother who put me on the wrong track from the very beginning. But two generations divide you and my grandmother. Now I see the gulf clearly in the urban light of Madras life.' Kittu was almost in a mood of entreaty before his wife for her forgiveness.

'It's not your fault, dear; it's our joint *karma* that the early years of our wedded life should be so conflicting and barren. My father, an astrologer, mentioned it to me at the time of our wedding but had hopes of our latter half. We have worked out the first. Let us bury the past and work and live for the future. We are still young to begin our lives again in the prettiest way and God be thanked you have been given back to me so wondrously safe.' Kamalam replied with a smile that had never shone in her face before.

'Now that my grandmother too has passed away, we can—' Kittu ventured a difficult theme.

'Alas, dear, that she should have left us when both of us were not by her death-bed!' Kamalam spoke with moving sincerity. 'She prayed for nothing else but a handful of fire at your hands all these years in her ripe old age.'

'God had decreed that she did not deserve it.'

'Why so harsh, dear? Rather say God had decreed we should not have the good fortune.'

'Then let it be so, Kamala. I see now that your good nature is infinite. Tell me, what shall we make of our future?'

'Why, go back to our village and work up the school once again on truer lines, on lines of love and freedom. I'll assist you in leisure hours. Let us admit girls as well and train them up into true mothers and sisters.'

'An excellent idea, Kamala.'

'The old school in that dilapidated house remains locked as it was locked by the mischievous boys on that eventful day. The President has closed the school for the present for want of a suitable teacher in the village. Let us go back and re-open it—not in the same century old house which seems a stuffy prison for the boys—but let us hold our classes under the deep shade of the Banyan tree in front of the village temple on the eternal banks of the Cauvery.'

'Yes, yes, Kamala. Let us drink in with the water-laden wind the new song of freedom that stirs India—.' Kittu, touched by the Eternal Feminine began to grow poetic.

'But dear, make one promise, will you, dear?'

Kittu gravely nodded assent and Kamalam continued: 'Never, never touch the cane or use a harsh word to the boys, dear.'

'Never, never, I swear,' Kittu almost rose from his reclining posture in a vivid gesture of sincerity. 'Need you, Kamala, tell me now with my fractured arm yet in the sling.'

A year had passed by. The full moon was shining in all her glory. All the boys and girls of Paramati had met there on the banks of the Cauvery in the evening hour to celebrate a picnic of joy. For on that day early morn when the Sun was shining in full native splendour in Leo, Kamalam gave birth to a son. There was the tender ecstasy of paternity in Kittu's eyes; a softness spread over his faltering voice; and he looked with adoring love on the little group of children that had gathered there for picnic on the fringe of the foaming freshes of the Akanda Cauvery, a mile broad and majestic, in her fullest hour of flood.

There is no such thing as a right to live, a right to work, or a right to be happy: in this respect man is no different from the meanest worm —NIETZCHE

THE HAUNTED VILLAGE

By M. CHALAPATHI RAU

NANDIGAM is one of those villages where brave words are spoken and brave deeds done but history is never made.

Some months after the Armistice a crowd was buzzing on the pial of the Jamedar's house. Ramiah was the tall bony man in the easy chair, with gaunt face, smooth snowy hair, deep-set hungry eyes, a wise mouth, and a military moustache. He had been a sepoy at twenty and a Jamedar at thirty in the Madras Infantry—a brilliant career; had done his bit in the third Burmese War, killing two Burmans and wounding another single-handed; had to bury his dreams of a good career at thirty-four when his regiment was disbanded; had settled down enjoying his pension and dreaming of Burma and kind old British officers. He was the foremost man in Nandigam by knowledge and experience, the only man who seemed to understand the Great War and talked about it vaguely, the supreme arbiter and adviser in almost all matters; and round him sat tall men, short men, old men, young men, brawny sunburnt rustics with eyes of wonder and mischief; the wily Karnam with pen stuck on to his ear; Naidu, a minor terror and cause of most troubles; Somanna, who had loved and won a fat rich widow; Appanna, the prodigal who had been in prison; Kapu who boasted he could kill a tiger or eat a whole sheep; and others less famous. They were there discussing the budget for the annual Festival of the Goddess.

'We must have twenty-five,' said Somanna like an overfed prophet. The reference was to sheep.

'Twenty will do,' pleaded Appanna, whose face was all hills and dales and ditches.

'We have money for thirty,' said the Karnam, who was a baritone. Then they fell into a babel of argument for a while, Appanna pleading 'twenty will do.'

'The bully is coming?' put in Naidu, in an undertone.

There was a hush and then a hum.

The bully came. It was Appala Sami, a tall hard-set man of thirty-six, though he looked about forty; strong of muscle and stern of countenance. He was not a drunkard but his eyes were dim and red. There was a stillness in his motion, an unmeaning sneer on his lips. He had had a hard life. That everybody knew. But everybody hated him as he hated everybody. There was nothing sinister in his aspect except his tanned skin, his face cast in the colour of bronze, his dim red eyes. He had the reputation of a terror, a reputation for bullying and blackmailing, a reputation that increased as each year came and went. He always worked or brooded lonely, and whenever he went about the village flourishing his stick to the motion of his thought the women cursed him and children hushed their laughter or tears.

'Listen, dears, I have not come to have the honour of looking on your faces. I want my rice and mutton. Let us be business-like.' The figure in bronze was speaking. There was a hush.

'Fiddlesticks,' said the Karnam.

The figure in bronze was muttering.

'Talks like Laard Kitchinaire?' said Pappanna, shrugging his shoulders with military pride. He was a little cock-eyed man with a merry face and merry eyes and his voice was soft as a dove's. He came, late, like the newly distinguished man, clad in his favourite grey military coat with a silver medal trying to shine on the brave unwounded chest, for he had returned only a week ago from his regiment and was much respected in spite of his comic frame and

too courtly manners. He was more than fifty-five, with four grandchildren and a lively imagination fed by the Jamedar's anecdotes of military adventures ; when the Great War broke out he dreamed for months and months ; then his moustache was uprooted, his hair coloured and combed, and the Jamedar as the recruiting officer winked ; Pappanna donned stiff grey coats ; went somewhere, he knew not where ; drilled till his legs ached and marched till he thought of home ; and at the end of the War was sent back with a medal and five acres. He had gone proud to the War and come back prouder. He was proud of his grey coats, his medal, his famous breed of fighting cocks. The crowd received Pappanna with smiles ; he cocked his eye to the right and cocked his eye to the left ; and after patronising everyone he sat at the feet of the Jamedar who was the only man higher in the village hierarchy and who now as ever, behaved towards him like a regimental commander.

'Listen, folk, listen,' began the Jamedar, who understood Sami better. 'We have not stolen the sheep. We have contributed each and bought them. You haven't given one pie, Appala Sami, nor helped us in any way. But I am willing to have a square deal. What do you say?' The crowd applauded him with their eyes. He was their leader for this crisis as for every other.

'Nothing less than two rams,' answered Sami.

'Fiddlesticks,' began the Karnam. 'This is not the first time you are bullying us. You have burnt my hayrick. You have stolen the ox of Appadu. You have been to prison. You have threatened us, assaulted us—in your beastly way.'

'Oh, not I alone. Did I cheat that young baby of his notes? Forge? Did I? Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Sami, rather too satirically.

The Karnam was crestfallen. He was wily but not brave.

'You fools! Stop,' exclaimed the Jamedar with authority. We give you the ram and the grain. That ought to be enough, Appala Sami. And, please, no more ultimatums.'

'One ram,' said some.

'No rams,' said others.

'Two rams,' repeated Sami, more laconic than ever.

'Rams, rams, rams! What are we going to eat? What are we going to eat?' tried to roar Pappanna and roared like a sucking dove.

'Shut up,' blazed Sami ; and Pappanna shut up. 'You have starved me this one month. What did I eat? Not your stuff!'

'Go to your grandfather?' cried Pappanna.

'Shut up.'

It was an offence twice repeated and Pappanna's military soul revolted.

'Son of an ass!' he retorted.

'Son of a whore. You liar. You blackguard. You pig. You, son of a dog.' Pappanna, lamb as he was, leapt like a lion in fury, and they closed in together, Pappanna crying 'son of an ass' and Sami crying 'son of a whore'; and Pappanna pulled him by the legs and Sami kicked him on the shins ; and Pappanna felt the earth a-spinning, a-spinning, a-spinning; and he came rushing on and Sami gave him a box on the ears; and Pappanna on Sami and Sami on Pappanna ; and the crowd shivered, moaned, gasped ; and Somanna, Appanna, and others parted them with much difficulty ; Pappanna crying 'son of an ass' and Sami crying 'son of a whore'.

Sami walked home meditatively. A fire was in his head. He had given the dog a good beating. He was always sure of that ; he could beat others ; dogs as well. But his heart was throbbing like a frog with the intensest hatred. He was digging in his consciousness, thinking, thinking. What will they do with me, do with me, do with me! Will they send me to prison again, prison ; will they ; they will not, they cannot ; those thieves ; they must come to prison with me ; the dogs ; what will they do with me ; the dogs, dogs, dogs; would they give me one foot to plough; that old fox, the Jamedar—wife's own

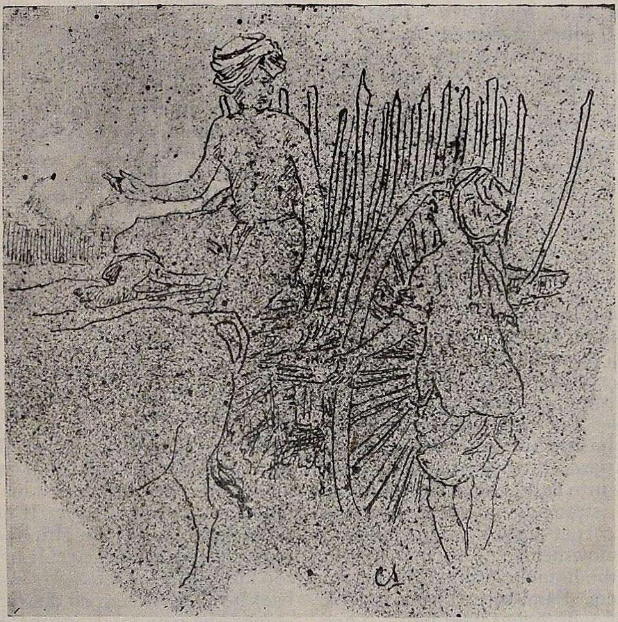
uncle, uncle, uncle ; did he recruit me ; he sent that fuzzy-wuzzy dog,Pappanna, to the War ; Pappanna to fight; a great man now; wife's own uncle; dogs, dogs; what will they do with me, do with me? He reached home and asked for his food. 'Food ? Do nothing and come home and ask for food. Food !' said Sooramma, bringing rice and eggs and soup, which she had brought from the Jamedar's house, as she would bring now and then. Sami was calm but bitter. 'Whore,' he cried, 'you will be happy as a widow.' Sooramma shivered. She was a woman of nerves, demure as a Madonna, with a round white face and soft flabby hands. He went near to beat her but merely held her by the head, drew her near, frowned on her and caressed her. 'What did you say?' he demanded. 'What did I say ! Well, I asked you if you had a mouth for eggs,' she replied and giggled. 'You whore,' smiled Sami and began to swallow the rice, eggs, soup, everything. 'You think I am good for nothing ?' he said. 'Ask yourself and you will know,' retorted Sooramma, eating her bit. 'You ought to have married that son of a dog, old Pappanna.' 'As luck would have it I married the son of the devil,' put in Sooramma coolly. Sami liked his wife any way; she was pretty and loved him; and three years after marriage they were waiting for a child. Sami wished for a son; Sooramma prayed for a daughter. 'You need not worry for to-morrow. My aunt has asked us for dinner,' said Sooramma, rather proud of her aunt. 'Shut up ! I will break your bones if you stir out to-morrow.' She was choked with tears. Sami looked very angry. 'All right. I will not go,' cried Sooramma bitterly. He felt tired, and was nodding his head into sleep.

Next day was a gala day in the village. The floors were plastered and made glossy with cow-dung and sprinkled with shining powder in varied patterns of palaces and heavens decorated with star-designs. House-fronts were festooned with green leaves, and plantain trunks were tied to doors with their leaves hanging like tattered flags. Twenty-five sheep, rams, and ewes from the same fold—uncles, mothers, sisters —were slaughtered, and shares were sold of almost every part ; and Pappanna liked and got the bowels of the fattest ram and minor bones full of marrow ; the heads were presented to the big houses ; the legs were auctioned ; and the stiff horns cast away for hungry dogs and kites. They feasted on and on till the evening ; and then they trooped out. The Jamedar was witty and sonorous wlth over-eating. Pappanna rocked with lusty laughter. The big men straightened and the little men bulged with satisfaction. Everyone was joyous ; all gabbled like geese ; and there was the chorus of the women's chatter. The richer of the women-folk rustled in silks of rose and jasmine ; and Pappanna, proud as a peacock, commanded them hither and thither. The village band blew the bugles and conches ; placidly, languidly beating their drums, like a hungry rump ; but the band-master looked gorgeous like a bride-groom. The Goddess was brought out in her freshest colours, with her gorgon face and gorgon hair, gigantic and goresome with her demon tusks, holding her scimitar and a bleeding head, garlanded with skulls, arrayed in her awfullest for her dance of death ; and ready to pounce on children, so it seemed to them. There were revellers and stragglers ; some jazzing, some jangling ; stout men delirious with dancing ; lithe men striped like tigers imitating the panther's step ; a pair of eyes peering through a bear's skin, toppling on toes ; one in ashes and peacock-plumes telling fortunes and rattling his drummikin. The Goddess was dragged ; the procession wheeled and mobbed and straggled; gathered and spread, spread and gathered. Evening was passing away ; the full moon rose like a melting jewel with its big round eye of gold ; and torches were flaring palely in the night.

'Fire ?' It was a voice. 'Fire !' someone cried. 'It is smoke. Fire ! Fire !' The cry spread. The Jamedar's house was on fire. The procession rocked, reeled, stood up; a "tiger" and four men ran and clambered up the walls ; water was drained by pots and vessels, even

handfuls. The Jamedar was gasping for breath. A small wind came from somewhere with fans. The fire was spreading to other houses. A cry, a gasp; and it spread. The children cried in tearful voices as the fire swept on its dreadful dragons; the women yelled, cursed Sami in painful staccato voices, and ran about like frightened rats. Someone called on God; someone thought of rain and looked above but

Sami rounded by the village, swinging his little torch. He was triumphant, wild, restless. He reached Siva's temple, sat for a while, felt restless. He went to the bell and rang it; it sounded lucidly. He rang it again, loud, louder. A wooden cart was coming creaking noises. 'Hooray!' cried the carter and bounded from his perch. He saw Sami. 'What be that, Sami?' he asked. 'Looks like fire?' Sami said chilly. 'Fire! Fire!



'What be that, Sami,' the carter asked.
'Looks like fire,' Sami said chilly.

not a speck of cloud could be seen. The sky was smoky with crimson splendours. It was a canvas of leaping light. The rafters broke, crashed, crackled up cinders. The wind was gusty among furry thatch and flaming timber. The fire had voices as it danced on the thatch, and house-tops burned like funeral pyres. There was twilight in the village, a twilight of dreadful red.

Hooray!' The carter whipped his bullocks and rattled away into the village.

Sami saw with awe that work of hate, the red glow staining the moonlight; he heard those cries, groans, clamours; heard the vagabond dogs yapping, yapping, yapping. He went to Siva's bull, stroked it by the nose, head, broad back, curling tail, hind legs; he sat on

it. He had done his work; nobody has seen him do it; he thought he would throw away his torch and sleep somewhere that night, perhaps there itself. Hell was behind him and before a wilderness of light. The groaning was louder, clearer; it seemed nearer and nearer. He listened. A crowd was coming out of the village with torches, staves, axes, scythes. He could not understand it. It stopped; it wavered; it was running towards the temple. He understood and leapt on his legs and began to run; remembered something, came back, took the torch, ran straight into the fields, blew the torch in a haystack, the Jamedar's haystack, ziz-zagged, lit another, and another, and another. Six haystacks flared up like hillocks of fire. The crowd of pursuers staggered. Pappanna, Somanna, and twenty others cursed that son of a dog, that son of a whore, that son of an ass. They yelled, bounded, and ran with treble speed. They were gaining ground.

The world lay wreathed in moonlight when Sami ran by the bracken and prickly-pear, across the fields, through the spike-like stubble. His blood bumped with each thud, warmed, and scorched the joints. The moon snowed heavily drifts of bluish whiteness, eddies, blurs, circles, curves, whiteness after whiteness, expanding into light, closing in shadows. The earth strangely coloured rose and fell like a carpet singed with snow and ended in snow-fields. The human reynard and the hounds sprinted like moonlight bathers. Sami turned back to look at those hounds racing after him. They would catch him and clap him in prison. He was not afraid of that. He had been in prison once; had liked those gay gaolers, those swinging gates and iron bars; there he had been happy with men, more gossiping than Pappanna, wiser than the Jamedar himself. But those hounds yapped for his blood. They would break his bones; those mocking voices, sinister forms, they would kill him. He surely did not want that. He must escape. Sami ran quicker, his blood rising in a million rills of heat, burning his skin, spouting, breaking, crashing like beads, his body melting in the blood. They too were running at their best, like spirits chasing a spirit. Nandigam in the distance shone with the brilliance of hell.

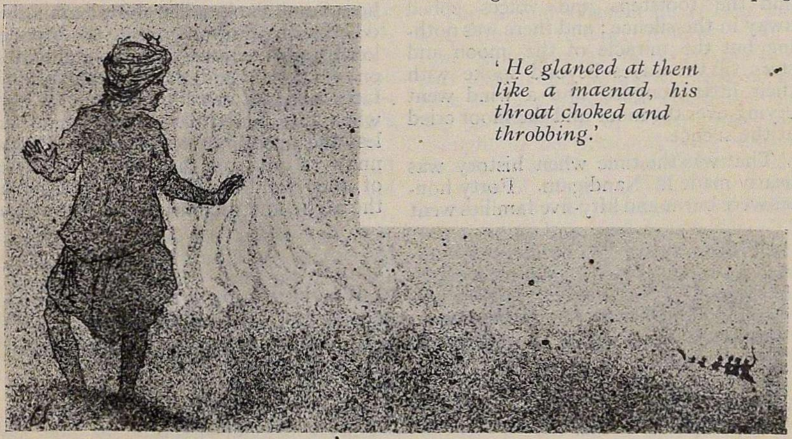
They were running faster and faster; he was running faster. They stopped and then he stopped. And then they were running again; and he was running. He was running not on two feet but a hundred feet. The joints were beaten on anvils. The flesh felt curves of flames as if it longed for agony and the fulfilment of pain. There was a wildness in his eyes, a wildness in his movements. But he was lithe with the grace and lightness of a fox, coming into the light, creeping into the shadows, lifted by pain, the cataracts of blood rising and falling, slowly rising, suddenly edging, and then the slow stooping pain. The moonlight closed on him like stinging muffiers. The moon that day was a wonder. Had they known it so before the folk would have danced at it. It was shining to the left of their eyes. Like a flower in the bogs of heaven. Like a mirror of the gods. Like Siva's burning eye. Like a temple of gold in a country of stars. Each saw it as it glimmered on his face. And it was running with them on the left of their eyes.

He was running from one hullabaloo to another for the folk of the neighbouring village had gathered amazed at the holocaust of Nandigam. If he ran into them he would be caught. He swerved to the left in a long circle; his pursuers too circled to the left. He was heading back to their village on the right. If he gained the mango grove that lay darkly under the stars he would be lost in its night. He must be cut off from the grove; the hounds divided and were wedging him. He was running for life like a human rocket; deep pain grew round his heart and bolted into the groins, tucked into the thighs, dug into the legs. The tumult behind him increased. The stump of flesh toppled into a bunker, gained the glebe paths, ran faster; wind-voices buzzing in his ears, a pain in his head, the earth spinning round and round. The muscles swelled, shrieked; the blood rang like wild bells,

echoing through furnaces. He was looking on the face of an unknown earth, an unknown country, the landscape dreaming under the moon, with stretches of light , ghostly flowers, pain, and the demonlike fury of things. He did not gain the grove but was near the brook that ripples to the village. He was ahead of them by yards and yards. They had lost him in intricate shadows and green meshes of light. He had outrun them, the dogs. They were slowing their pace; suddenly they stopped. Sami bounded over the chasm and crouched for a while panting.

He stumbled to the brook and leaned over the edge of the waters. He was frightened by the strange perspective: the waters waving with little mouths, monsters gliding and glistening, floating jungles, swirls, monstrous movements, green upthrusts, shadows, inhuman splutter, and phantom voices. His frame shivered ; the blood still sang its song of pain; his body seemed to tumble. His heart was beating slow and slower. He was cooling. The mist in his eyes cleared ; and the earth glowed with light like a clean flat garden. The water shone like mirrors. The ripples danced on glistening pebbles. Sami dipped his scorched feet and hands, held the water and let it fall like tears, thinking of the water that moved behind his eyes. He walked to the other side and lay there flat on the red sands panting still. He felt sweetly satisfied ; it was a sweetness very near bitterness and strangeness. The fairy light flowed into him and mixed with his blood. He was thinking of the day's events ; his run ; his wife ; his future. It was all meaningless. He did not know how it all happened. He saw the moon stirring on branches and was feeling the sweeping hush of sleep.

But the hunters were near. They saw that son of a dog, son of a whore, son of an ass, silhouetted in the light. Pappanna, Somanna, Kapu, and the rest chanted their curses and ran at him. They faced him as he glanced at them like a maenad, his throat choked and throbbing; and then the chorus of curses and shower of stones. Sami was bleeding; his blood rose to a centre, trembled, and extended. They yelled and jumped after him as he ran again on weary limbs. He was tired very soon this time ; the life had gone out. They too were tired, lifeless and voiceless, like leaves running in the wind, like lost souls wandering away. They were so near him; he was frightened at his own shadow. The green earth was greener. All things were running past him. The light was hitting him. He felt the presence about him of bats hanging by their feet and blind old winking owls ; a drumming in his veins, a slow sweeping



'He glanced at them like a maenad, his throat choked and throbbing.'

hum; aware of nothing but the wild rapture of that running and strange shapes of light and shade crowding in his eye. The earth glowed weird and dreaming in those gardens of the moon, unreal and unfamiliar; trees, shrubs, grass, green elephants, green geese, green snakes, unseen ghosts, and unheard voices. The fire in his limbs rose to a light in his face and lit it with deathly pallor. He did not feel like running at all. Some force, some great pull was tugging him away by heart-roots and his feet were hurrying. His spirit went ahead like a white light dragging his body which lagged behind. A wind went crying over the moor and the moor cried at the silence. Stars fell on him; burning, winking, blinding pins of light, shining, he did not know, in life or death; star after star and a wilderness of stars. For the first time he saw and felt the glory of the constellations. The pursuers lagged behind and straggled. He was choking and hissing; he drank in the wisping midnight wind; choked and hissed and snarled. He was gaining the upland. One last sprint, and he faced the moor mile after mile bared to the moon, and the *ghats* crouched behind like ghosts. His figure was twitching with pain; it grew fainter and fainter like a god in pain running from star to star. They then wended back to the village chattering and jabbering; and the footsteps and voices ebbed away in the silence; and there was nothing but the miracle of the moon and stars, till the leaves beyond spoke with their little tongues and a wind went crying over the moor and the moor cried at the silence.

That was the time when history was nearly made in Nandigam. Forty houses were burnt and fifty-five families went homeless for months. The earth has grown up again into mud-walls, huts, and houses, with more of tile this time; and life in the village is same as before. The one track dangles and swerves and dives. The old grandfathers dodder; and vagabond dogs nose about. Pappanna is dead. Somanna is dead. The Jamedar has moved to town. Naidu is still a terror. Whenever a brave word is spoken or a brave deed done rumour spreads that Sami has returned. He has not yet returned. One day he may return; and then may be like a ghost in the moonlight. But everything is strange on fullmoon nights. The whole village seems a haunted village. It is moon-ridden and star-ridden. The moon comes like a witch-enchantress. The stars wink and wink like owls. The bats hang by their feet so deadly still, smiling like rats. A hundred silences brood and a hundred sounds tinkle in their ears. The brook gurgles on weirdly with gulping sounds. Ploughmen from fields trudge back on noiseless feet and everything seems done by phantom hands. The temple bell rings like the cry of ghouls. Faces are haunted by memories of olden times. Shadows like demons lurk everywhere; and the eyes of numberless ghosts; and the hush hush of graveyards and ghostly feet. Little children listen as their mothers or grandmothers tell them how Sami bullied, how Sami blackmailed, how Sami quarrelled with everyone; how he brooded lonely, worked lonely, ate lonely, and so on and on; and the dreaming little faces burgeon out like flowers of light when the older folk tell them in toneless and medium-like voices of Pappanna's return from the War, of the feast of the Goddess, the seven-mile-run in the night, and the burning of Nandigam.

Wherever a grass grows
Or a leaf buds, the Eternal Man is seen, is heard, is felt
And all his sorrows, till he reassumes his ancient bliss.—BLAKE

THE LAST PAWN

By MANJERI S. ISVARAN

MOUNT Road is a long, throbbing artery of traffic opening from the heart of the city. On either side of it, alleys and by-lanes spread like a network of nerves, over which rot big decaying houses and miserable mud-hunked hovels like congealed masses and clots of black blood. In the verandah of one such hovel Tricumdas Fatthemul ran his pawn-shop. A tiny shop, of the size of a magnified perambulator, it displayed linen and silks in various degrees of fading, cheap brass pots heaped up in a corner, and trinkets of lack-lustre gold and silver gasping for breath in a glass case dim with dust and the touch of humid fingers. Against this case, surveying the things within affectionately, Fatthemul presided in the fashion of a great Moghul, his body, all a belly and like a huge cask, deposited on a sumptuously dirty cushion (the belly remained static all through the hours of the day except when the police called in to inquire if he were harbouring any stolen property), and his bullet head thrust into long ruler-like pillows. His turban, rising coil upon coil like a speckled snake, was mutely eloquent of the nature of the head it adorned. Tricumdas Fatthemul came from Marwar; Marwar is terribly money-conscious; and Madras is mid-summerly mad to consume the marwari's money wilfully unconscious that he ploughs it for a harvest of carbuncles—of usurious interest. And Fatthemul's clients were mostly of the weaker sex.

It was a raw morning with a wind biting into the bones. And the wind biting into the bones of the passer-by, made in the image of god but of common clay (a more durable material could not be found in all the markets of the seven heavens), only made the marwari dance like a dark pillar of flame in the smouldering wilderness of his greed. Fatthemul with the keen shifty eyes of the cat looked catily into the street. 'No one coming to-day,' his mind murmured, and the thought loitered from his narrow mind into his capacious belly where it was inclined to linger as an ache. But it was not to linger as an ache. Fatthemul's stomach was no place for aches.

There was no sun in the morning sky to fret away the twilight; yet, there was quite another sun on the earth; it was Fatthemul's which expanded so, the wrinkles radiating like rays. Fatthemul had seen a woman swiftly approaching. He knew why she hid her hands crushed within the folds of her saree; knew why her face was pinched up like a nut, the pupils shrunk in the white dry declivities of her eyes, and the check bones shining with the sharpness of stones.

The woman drew her saree tightly over her shoulders and leaned against the edge of the verandah. She must make up her mind, she was desperate.

'Two rupees,' the marwari said deliberately and with an air of finality. Then pursing his lips to the thin line of a razor blade: 'A pair of cheap-stoned, colourless, common ear-ornaments,' he muttered. His voice sounded hard, steely, remote; and his face marbled to the immobility of a monstrous icon's.

The woman's bosom heaved up for a last attempt to beg for more. For a time her tongue lay heavy for her mind was tearful and far-away. She did not hide her face which she would have hidden in moments of softer grief. She thought of her husband lying disabled for life in a little thatched hut outside the hem of the town. He was a road-mender and was wrecked thus, boiling tar scalding him while on work. The compassionate Corporation called him a poor devil and gave compensation (they considered it more as a charity than compensation because the fault was entirely the man's), but the coins were few and heavily tarred. She, however, washed them bright by her tears, but they did not breed as the marwari's. And she continued mending roads leaving

half her aching heart with the maimed husband in the hut and throwing the other brimful and ever-watchful half into the precious hammock of old cloth hanging from the branch of the roadside tree. But that hammock had not been hung these many restless days of carking fear and anxiety. Was the pearl to be cut out from the protective bosom of the shell?

'He's the only child left me out of seven,' she cried and paused abruptly. The talk quaked her flesh strangely. They could not be called children because they had died very young; they were so many tumours of her body which a sportive divinity had delighted to cauterize. 'He's bad, so bad,' she resumed, 'and his shrieks of pain—' here she broke off shuddering as the wind; then uttered the name of her patron goddess: 'I can't bear, oh, I can't. Kindly, kindly, double the sum.'

The plangent waves of her appealing voice beat high, then feebler and feebler against the rocky heart of the pawnbroker; then, with a hush as of the gloaming fell suddenly away. The last despairing hope of a living motherhood shone radiant and regnant on her face.

'Two rupees or no money,' hissed the marwari throwing the objects in front of her and turned as if too busy with the tattered ledgers and dustbound account books.

The ear-ornaments looked on with the helplessness of a babe. The woman closed her eyes for a moment choking her being into a single scintillating cell of pain; then snatching the money fled precipitately away.

Tricumdas Fatthemul caressed the lovely pawn, stroked his buxom belly. The vision of the next auction sale floated like a veil before him.

'Kindly, kindly, double the sum.'

In the evening of the same day a woman wept stormily over the body of a dead child in the room of a Hakim. The Hakim had a double reputation: that of a great physician and of a great *pilao*-eater. And which reputation was on the increase? For every fresh sore on a womb which believed, and believing, reproached his curative powers, he only relished the dish he was so fond of, a degree daintier.

JUST FOR A HOLIDAY

By NARAYANA

THE City Lords was alive and happy with people. In the golden light of the setting sun the gay animated lords walked in, one by one, in pomp and dignity. Their cheerful smiling faces were gilded and their clothes took on purple tints as the rays of the sun invaded the restaurant through the vast open windows. The people were cut up into select circles and each company was having its own important debate over tea. Amid the lines of lords one individual in full white Khadi suit dazzled all eyes. He had a look quite peculiar, a manner quite out of the way. He chatted happily with his table-mates and in the radiant light of the sun watched with a benign smile each visitor fade out of the restaurant. After a long time he rose from the chair suppressing a yawn. He was tall, bony, and imperial and easily over-topped everybody. His face was shining as if it had been polished. He advanced towards us with a triumphant air. He smiled at the passers-by, at the servers, at the setting sun, in fine at the whole of Bombay. And when he passed, all the loungers turned round as if affected in some way or other. He suddenly stopped as he came to our table and fixed his gleaming and delighted eyes on my friend. The corners of his mouth expanded to his ears betraying his fine white teeth tinted with the marks of chronic betel chewing. My friend looked rather serious and resented this undue familiarity. I only wondered at this ebony giant unable to understand his delight.

With a strange moving voice, breaking into laughter, he said, 'Good day, Sardar.'

I was struck very much by his hard simplicity. My friend was a trifle puzzled because he carried the air of an important man in and out of season and the cafés were the places where he carried it most. My friend replied: 'Well, I am at a loss to know you, Sir. What do you want of me.' He ended curtly.

'What! you don't mean to say you have forgotten———. He laughed boisterously. My friend felt his self-respect was in peril. He looked at the man much bewildered and tried to refresh his memory. Then he broke out charmingly, 'Hallo, Gokul!'

Gokul was radiant and slapped his thigh as he guffawed. 'Yes, yes. I know you should have forgotten me—by the by—how goes it with you?'

My friend held out his hand laughing pleasantly as he did so. I was quickly introduced to the gentleman.

Gokul observed abruptly, 'Old boy—made much money?' He swelled himself out and his words fell over one another as he poured into our ears a short history of fifteen long years of his stay abroad.

'So you escaped from the jungles!' remarked my friend.

'Oh, long ago,' he replied. I left South Africa during the War and went up to Mesopotamia in the first batch of volunteers. I could not serve there owing to some rub with the boss and then I left for France and studied several miscellaneous things in Signat's Institute. Meanwhile I had a call from Persia and my friend Martin found for me a job in the Military accounts department.' He ended with an apparent relief of pride which one should naturally have when one's career has a touch of the adventurous and the romantic.

My friend gaped in wonder whilst I had booked him already for a place in my pages.

'So lucky to see you, Gokul. You are a really adventurous fellow,' my friend began.

'But for the risks I exposed myself to, do you think, Sardar, I ever dreamt of making £ 50 a month?

'Really,' I interposed.

'But where have you been since your return to India ?' Sardar questioned.

'Nearly a fortnight ago I landed in this place. I had been to Rajaputana to see my kinsfolk. Now I will stay here a couple of months to meet all old friends and enjoy their company.'

'By the by, what is the matter ? I see none of our old friends in Bombay. Within these fifteen years Bombay has changed much, indeed very much,' he expressed.

'It is changed. One by one our friends have left the city. You know Sethna, he was our class-mate. He is now a barrister in Poona. You know Mehata, he is now the Chief Secretary of the Mercantile Bank. You know our famous tennis player Vidyarthi. That small, lean fellow,—of course now it is a question of bringing to life defunct memories. The fellow died a tragic death !'

'How ?'

'Committed suicide when he lost everything in a horse race.'

'It is a pity—awful !' He ended in a tone choked with emotion.

My friend ran over a hundred names and incidents within a brief space of five minutes. He was almost an abridged reference-book of Who's Who.

I knew my friend too well. He had a weakness for rank and status. He would never befriend anybody who was not likely to be of some use to him. Sardar would simply pass by Gokul and pretend not to have noticed him, if he were convinced that he had no status.

He ended the interview. And Gokul said, 'Thank you very much, Sardar. I will surely go over to you for dinner next Sunday at half-past seven.'

Gokul rose shaking the hand that was extended to him, smiled, and cried again : 'Gooday, Gooday, Sardar.'

He was so happy at meeting his own countrymen, after a long period of foreign stay, that he gesticulated as he walked and people thought he was crazy. Distance is always a factor in the love of any object for a little aloofness always conduces to the amicability of our relationship. Proximity punishes intimacy while distance smoothens difference.

'A fine fellow, quite a funny and innocent fellow,' remarked Sardar beaming with a covert joy as I shot a deliberate glance at his fading smile.

2

In Dr Pratap's house in the Malabar Hill three men sat round a table. My friend Sardar was there. Gokul was expected presently. Sardar sat at the head of the table. Pratap was a thin-faced judicial-looking man who had a cunning wit and a winning humour.

'It is a beautiful little place,' said Gokul as he stepped into the house. 'And I suppose I am lucky in having met all the esteemed worthies of this evening,' he resumed after the interjection of a laugh. He was given a warm greeting. They drifted into talk over diverse subjects extending in range from the dry weather to the divinity of man. As the port passed from hand to hand the conversation became very friendly and intimate.

'If I,' said Sardar, 'were to take up that business at Madras, I know I should simply get vexed with wealth and that would put me out for good.'

'I should like to know all about it,' implored Gokul in a deep voice which went naturally with the rest of his physical make-up.

'It is all a difficult one. Even Yusuff could not manage it carefully,' observed Pratap simply.

They looked at Gokul.

'Seriously,' asked Gokul stupidly.

'Oh, yes. From what I know I believe the plan is working miracles, but it requires a lot of investment. If one could sink a lakh of rupees hard cash immediately, surely within one year there are bound to be enormous returns.'

'Surely,' cried Pratap with an assenting nod.

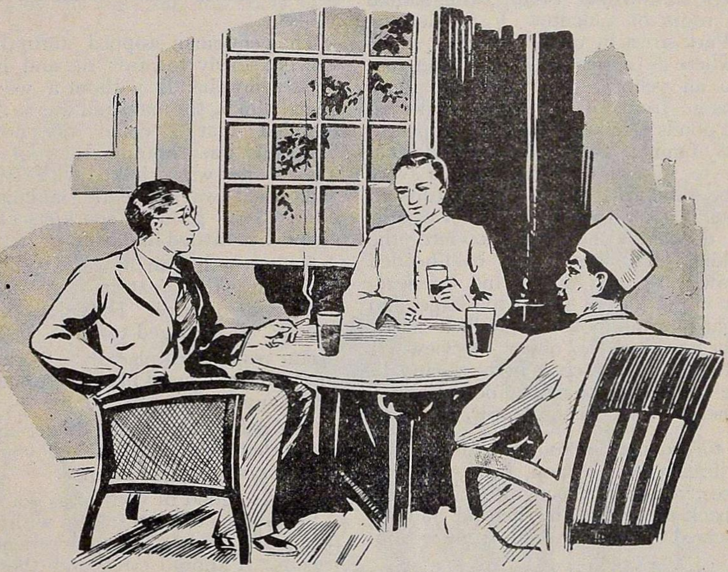
'No doubt about it,' confirmed his friend. All welcomed the idea. Then in a burst of confidence they talked

about most recondite business problems. They talked in whispers, often intervened by deliberate pauses to Gokul whose eyes dilated progressively. His cheeks expanded into a happy laugh when the talk ended.

'That's what I am waiting to have,' boomed Gokul helping himself to port. 'As for the money don't care. It is all too silly. What's wanted is friendship and fairplay. I would gladly be his partner if only you assent to be in the board of directors.'

sat smoking, why it was that he left his native country while a fortune could easily have been made in his next door itself. His big brows were drawn low as he built dream-castles in the air of the prosperity and prominence that were to be his soon in his native country.

This was but one of the numerous parties that were given to him soon after his arrival was made known throughout the city. He was a cheerful, honest, and kind-hearted gentleman with a mixture of refined gentleness and



'The conversation became very friendly and intimate.'

'Well,' interposed Pratap. 'I will make matters plain for I dislike all manner of diplomacy. We should always have a watchful eye over the accounts.'

For the rest of the function Gokul was sunk in deep thought. It was not until Pratap burst out into a laugh, however, that his thoughts took a definite shape. He had many things to think about. He was wondering now, as he

rude simplicity, quite unconsciously conjoined. He was at any rate, not schooled in the vile ways of the world; was loving and lovable and irradiated breezy confidence from every feature of his massive personage, and in especial, from his large liquid eyes and his big domed head with its thick brush of black curls. There was not a theatre he did not attend, not a gathering which he did not address during his brief stay

in Bombay. He took a genuine delight in doing a good turn. Mr Sardar and Dr Pratap made him a personality of Bombay within six months of his arrival from Persia.

3

We, the race of authors, have our own peculiar ways; in our own realm we are puny fates; we are unquestionable and very often mysterious. Everything attracts us and nothing keeps us more than a moment. Our pleasure is to photo and retouch.

The sun was just disappearing behind the roofs of Calcutta. I strolled on to Park street by chance. I was going nowhere in particular. The street rose into an yellow light and the fountains in front of the villas appeared like ponds of liquid silver. I had passed many familiar houses. As I looked casually to my right I descried a very nicely-designed board: The Eastern House. At a glance, the waiter caught me up and conducted me into the building. He was an old bald-headed fellow with rigid lines on his forehead. His clothes were much too large and elegant for his looks. I walked inside with him with no object in view. I seated myself in a chair in the verandah. The waiter said to me, 'Good Madrasi dinner, Sir. Master inside, Sir.'

I turned sharply round and scanned his features whereupon, he continued: 'I see, you do not recognise me. I will be back presently, Sir,' he said and disappeared to answer a call from within.

I looked at the board and found a name "Bhatt". I thought he was a resident in the hotel. The clock struck six. A servant ushered into the room a man of about forty, already grey. He was stout and tall. He was leaning on a staff and was strutting with effort. He did not notice me. He glanced at the menu paper on the table, went and looked into the book-case and then sat down opposite to me. A side door opened, and a smart well-washed, well-dressed little boy ran in. The gentleman took him up in his arms, kissed him affectionately, tossed him into the air and held him up to the ceiling. Then, taking him on his knees he made him ride a cock horse. The child laughed and clapped his hands and shouted with pleasure.

I looked at the gentleman more closely. As the child crept towards me he looked at me intently. My God, his face became pale as he turned his glistening eyes away from me. I was stupefied and gave an uneasy and resigned look.'

'Well, am I intruding on you, Sir?' I stammered.

'Sir, dinner ready,' announced the waiter.

The gentleman stopped abruptly, advanced slowly towards me and lightly pressed my hands without a word. I seized him by the hand and was so dumbfounded that I could say nothing. The child was shouting the roof down. The waiter was choked with surprise and turned away, violently slamming the door. The pendent sparklets of the chandelier rattled like bells.

He was still with his head bent low. 'Well, it is the greatest surprise of my life to see you here. How does it come about?' I managed to ask.

He responded placidly: 'Ay, it is so easy. In a world like this, we are not stable any moment.'

The waiter announced dinner again.

'Author, somehow I liked you ever since I saw you,' he resumed.

'It is so good of you to say so.'

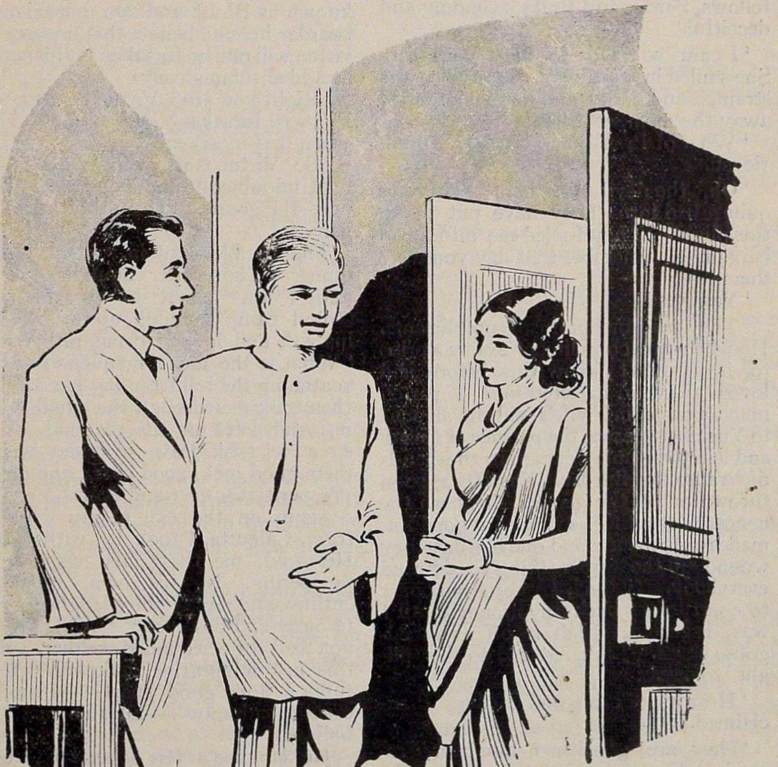
'It is so rare we meet with good people. I had a cruel experience of friends. I know I erred and there was no second chance left for any error in life.'

'How is it you are so terribly disabled?'

'That's the reason for all this trouble. You know, when I left Persia, I left the place on leave with salary for six months. Seven years of service I had put in in that department. I could have easily reached the top rank had I not received this stroke. When I landed in Bombay I was the happiest man alive. All the bigwigs envied me my postion. I left the city after a time to Ratnagiri District.

One day the devil tempted me to go on an excursion into the woods. Some villagers followed me. That was a very bad day. Unexpectedly, the sky became one big mass of clouds. Rain poured down in torrents. We became helpless. I was chilled to the marrow. I felt I would die there itself. As the last rumbling note of thunder died out on the distant hills a streak of light broke the gloom. I was shuddering as my companions bore me home. That was the beginning of my misery, begun by Nature and completed by Man. I slept unconscious on the bed for forty-eight hours. On the third day I found the left portion of my body completely paralysed.

My body shook in tremors. I was in a hopeless predicament. My period of leave was running out and I was doubtful whether I could get an extension. Already thousands of unemployed were in the field and the authorities were looking with disfavour all cases of leaves and exemptions. I was in a fix and ran up to the Bombay office much against the protests of my wife. They conducted a searching medical examination and the Board declared me



'The door opened and showed a slender woman who looked a trifle tired.'

unfit for further service and even notified that I would go mad if I left the country. My holiday trip ended my services. I was very anxious about the future, and Dr Pratap and Sardar worked on my behalf. They moved the Government in the matter, wrote to their friends in London to use their influence. All ended in a mess. I fell on evil days—all just for a holiday.'

The clock struck eight. The door opened again and showed a slender woman who looked a trifle tired. 'Kamala, you know our friend. He is from Madras. He is an author. I like him immensely. He is not like those fellows, Sardar and Pratap, cunning and deceitful.'

'I am so glad to meet you, Sir.' She smiled in a sad way. Her voice was strained and jerky and her smile faded away the moment it lighted.

'What of Pratap and Sardar?' I questioned.

'Oh, the devil take them. They are quite a bad lot. They have put me to this plight. They fooled me into a bad bargain—I remember that day you were there.'

'Yes, yes.'

'They paid me profuse compliments. He who says a compliment exacts a price for it. I didn't know this before and loved all who flattered me. I parted much against my wife's will the amount to Yusuff. I became the partner of Yusuff and left the whole concern in the hands of Pratap and Sardar. Yusuff was soon thrown out of the game. They ran the concern for a time, swindled a good lot, made ready money and one fine day they wound up the whole thing to defraud everybody. My God, I went from court to court to get back my money until I was disgusted. I left it off as a wild-goose chase. I am reduced to this plight to-day.'

'Horrors! Pratap and Sardar!' I exclaimed.

'They are gentlemen humbugs,' remarked Kamala in a stern tone. The child stared at us.

'What could I do, Author? I tried to drop into some place. These hard days who would think of me when better men are stranded? I waited for a good time and then came away to this place. I opened this hotel only a few days ago.' He gasped for breath and became very pale. The light made shallows in his round cheeks and his dark eyes burned as he spoke quietly and tensely.

'What does it matter what trade you ply as long as you eat your honest food?' I consoled on the dignity of honest labour.

'You are right; that's the courage that keeps me in good cheer. The hotel is run under an assumed name. I am known as Bhutt and am considered a boarder here. I believe that honesty and virtue will not be forsaken in this world,' he added submissively.

'Right you are. Virtue is virtue even if it is forsaken. It is more virtue when it is forsaken.'

'So, Virtue is its own reward.'

'Undoubtedly; and it demands a sacrifice—the greatest of all—thought of any gain.

The couple went in. I finished my dinner. The waiter brought the bill and I was about to pay him. Mr Gokul came running up followed by his wife and looked at me rather sadly. 'What is the idea?' he queried huskily, snatching the bill from my hand. They then took me through the whole building and left me at the end of the street. I took leave of them wishing them good luck, good cheer, and radiant prosperity for ever and ever.

Again on the eve of my departure from Calcutta, I took tea with Gokul. He told me that his business was prospering. In his own usual and enthusiastic way he laughed boisterously and observed: 'Well, brother, not bad for a wounded soldier. I deem this just a sportive shake of Fate. I think I am a good sport——I am not exactly unhappy——all this just for a holiday.'

He laughed. His sober laugh echoed in my ears amidst the clatter of wheels on the hard iron rails as I sat in my compartment to bear me on to my destination.

THE SOLE DIFFERENCE

By KRISHNA R. GURUSWAMI REDDIAR

THE room was suffused with the autumn twilight. Outside a thin mist hung in the air caressing the tree-tops. And through the window I could see glorious colours dance and disappear in the West.

'It is getting rather cold. Won't you come nearer the fire ?' I said to my new Persian friend, pointing to the sofa near me and he complied, thanking me with embarassing politeness.

'I am sorry to have interrupted you,' I apologised, prompting him to continue his talk.

'No, no,' he protested. 'I was only saying that it is a kind compliment for you to say that Persians are handsome.' And he smiled shrewdly.

'Now, do tell me about the women of your country,' I asked. 'The girls are very beautiful, aren't they ?'

'Ah, monsieur,' he began with great eagerness, 'that's true, quite true ; I have travelled the world—America, Japan, China, Egypt,—and . . .'

'India ?' I put in.

'No, not India,' he said and went on : 'Ceylon, Arabia, and I have lived in Europe two years ; but Persian girls are the most beautiful. Yes, oh yes.'

He stopped for a moment and then added with emphatic enthusiasm, 'Yes, they are most beautiful in my country.'

'Excuse my asking, but how ? how beautiful ?'

'Ah, their faces are peculiarly beautiful,' he replied with a thoughtful look. 'Not simply beautiful as here—different, pardon me, but such sweetness in their faces—sweetness—different—.'

And all at once with knitted brows he plunged into a mood of deep thinking ; his troubled eyes indicated a searching mind. He was trying hard to recollect something and finally seemed to give up in sheer exhaustion.

'Pardon me, I cannot remember the word. English : this language is so bad. In their faces there is such . . . . such . . . .' He stopped, unable to find the word he wanted.

'Loveliness,' I suggested, trying to help him.

'No,' it wasn't that.

'Charm ?'

'No,' again.

'Handsomeness ?'

'Oh, no !'

'Grace ?' I brought forth doubtfully. He shook his head violently.

'That's not it at all. Yes, all this is right ; but in their faces there is such . . . such . . . .' He closed his eyes.

'What can it be ?' I wondered, and then made my final effort almost desperately.

'Do you mean Expression ?'

I had not even uttered the new word fully when to my surprise he jumped up with joy and shook me by the hand very thankfully all the while repeating the word "Expression".

'There is such *expression* in their faces. *Express* . . . .'

'Is that the sole difference then ?' I asked.

'Yes, that is the *soul* difference,' was his ready reply.

'That is the difference of the soul.'

He smiled and I smiled too.

After he had left, I felt restless and paced up and down the room with a wretched feeling, but it all came to an end when I found myself saying : 'Ah, the fellow has never been in my country and he has never seen . . . ! . . . nor . . . oh my, . . . What does he know ?'

SHE KEPT FAITH

By M. A. PARASURAMAN

'It's hard indeed. Just look at our neighbour's child; he looks so charming in his gold necklace. Won't you have one made for our boy?' said Lakshmi to her husband.

She was a young Brahmin woman, plain but attractive, slender as a reed, with dark eyes and dark hair tied neatly up in a braid. She wore a black saree with yellow silk fringes reaching down to her ankles in graceful folds. She held her darling boy on her hip, her left arm gently entwining him. Her husband Varada Sastri was a profound scholar in Sanskrit to learn at whose feet students from all corners of the southern districts poured to the humble village.

It was eleven o'clock in the day. A little tired after his work Varada Sastri had thrown himself on the cradle in the parlour, and was gently rocking himself. His wife who had completed her preparations against the dinner was sitting with her boy on her lap. Now and then she kissed him uttering those words of endearment which only a mother knows how to utter.

They had been married six years and their wedded life had been extremely happy. With a self-abnegation that was truly wife-like, she had resisted her love of jewels, and had contented herself with the minimum set of jewellery, but where her child was concerned, her maternal fondness overcame other feelings. She therefore tried to coax him into her views.

'Well, my dear, your wish is but natural, nor do I grudge the money. But a jewel on the boy is temptation to avarice and a risk to the child's life.'

Just then there was a tap at the door hearing which Lakshmi laid her child on the ground and opened it. Her cousin Venugopan, whom she had not seen for long, stepped in. She confusedly dropped a word of welcome and hurried in. Varada Sastri got up from the cradle greeting him restrainedly.

2

Varada Sastri and Venugopan had been fellow-students who had learnt at the feet of the same master. Varada was a bright lad. His conduct was exemplary, and his disposition as amiable as his intellect was lofty. Venu, on the other hand, was envious and revengeful by nature and sought to make up for his want of intellect by low cunning and dissimulation. He, however, failed miserably in his attempt and hated his rival. To crown all, there came to him a great mortification.

Venugopan's uncle had an only daughter, then about ten years old, who united in her person the inestimable advantages of exceptional personal charms and a sweet disposition. From her childhood, Sambasiva Iyer had wished to give her in marriage to his nephew. The time being come to give away her hand in betrothal, with the intent of seeing for himself how far his nephew had progressed in his studies, he paid a visit to the teacher.

'Sir,' said he, when they were alone together, 'I hope you approve of my choice.'

'Hem, I should think so,' replied the teacher.

'Have you anything to say against my nephew?' This in an anxious tone.

'Well, I would request you to stay here and judge for yourself. I wish that you may have no fault to find.'

This was not very encouraging. Sambasiva Iyer stayed for a few days with the old preceptor and his enthusiasm for his nephew waned. His heart gradually and insensibly warmed towards the amiable Varada. He inquired into his antecedents and learned that Varada, left an orphan at an early age, was taken into the home of the child-

less preceptor, who brought him up as his own son. And he cast about in his mind between the two and ultimately decided in favour of Varada. The wedding came off gloriously, much to the chagrin of the discomfited Venu whose parents felt sorely wounded by this affront to their dignity. Venu discontinued his studies and assiduously turned to the profession of his father who was a noted usurer. Varada had tried to be friends with Venu but his attempts at conciliation were of no avail.

Meanwhile Varada completed his course of studies. His teacher gave over his possessions to Varada and retired to live a secluded life. He did not live long after his retirement, but to the very end of his life Varada and his wife ministered to his comforts with a tenderness inspired by affection and stimulated by reverence.

3

'Welcome, friend,' said Varada Sastri, 'it's a rare visit. I hope your people are doing well.'

'Thank you,' replied Venu, 'I am doing pretty well. Is that your boy? Such a nice child!'

They sat and talked of old days. They referred to the time they had been chums and the tricks which each had played.

'I'm so glad,' said Varada Sastri, 'you're so altered. It's really a pleasure to meet a friend of one's student days.'

'Well,' said Venu, I came here on business and thought I might pay you a visit. You know when last we met we parted in anger. I have got over those childish fancies. We must forget the past and be friends once again.'

These words took Varada by surprise. He was sincerely glad of the reconciliation and pressed Venu to stay with him for a week.

This was the very thing that Venugopan had wished for. He was smitten at first sight with his cousin's beauty, and the former hatred of his rival which had lain dormant in him so long, revived once more, with redoubled force.

'I have pressing engagements,' he said, 'but I shall put them off.'

4

It was a fine moonlit night with not a speck of cloud in the blue sky. The sun had set an hour or so. The short twilight, so short in the tropics, had entirely vanished. The moon shone in all her rich unrobed resplendence hushing the country with her cool caressings. The brook glided along in gentle murmurs, and lost itself in a verdant grove of mango. The stream of water, ankle-deep, had sunk into the narrow proportions of Autumn, and ran in the middle of the bed, laying bare on either side the gentle undulations of fine white sand. A small dam of sand had been put up across a portion of the bed, through which the sparkling water oozed out into a rill. On this bright spot, Varada Sastri was seated alone, enjoying the beauty of the scene. From a distance came the mellowed music of tinkling bells from a pair of straggling cows that were browsing undisturbed on the meadow in front. Charmed into forgetfulness of self by the harmony of Nature around him, and unconscious of the passage of time, he sat there half-dreaming, half-awake when all at once his feelings received a rude shock. He heard a voice from behind, a voice in which he heard his wife's name mentioned. He looked behind him and saw two men lying down on the ground under the shade of trees. They were conversing in subdued tones. Piqued into curiosity, Varada Sastri stealthily glided into the grove.

'You don't mean her, Varada Sastri's wife, do you?' asked one of them.

'I *do* mean her,' replied the other. 'She is an out and out jade, and her husband is a fool.'

'Why, what's the matter?'

'You know that Venugopan is now his guest. He is no good, you know. He has almost succeeded in blighting the married happiness of the Sastri?'

'But surely Lakshmi is none of that sort.'

'Look here, Ramu, how should I know that an altercation ensued between Lakshmi and her husband with reference to a necklace for her boy? Venu

watched for his opportunity and has won his way to the good graces of Lakshmi by a judicious praise of her son. He has wormed the secret out of her, and having with him a necklace—an unredeemed pledge—just the one for the boy, has pressed her into accepting it.'

'Well, who could have thought of it, and that of Lakshmi too ?'

'My dear friend, the necklace is but the beginning of the romance and who knows where it may lead to ? But it's time we be returning home.'

With this Swami and Ramu—for it was they who were talking—rose up and walked home. Their words had fallen in Varada's ears like molten lead.

Maddened by jealousy he rushed home to learn everything for himself. His wife was alarmed by his manner.

'Have you got a necklace with you?' he demanded abruptly.

She stood silent.

'Who gave it to you?' he thundered.

'Hear me, dear husband, I'll tell you all,' said Lakshmi beseechingly.

'Who gave it to you ?' he hissed out between his teeth.

'I pray you, hear me. It was Venu who gave it. I shall explain everything.'

'I've heard enough ! Good God ! That it should have come to this !'

'Who gave it to you,' he thundered. 'Hear me, dear husband, I'll tell all,' said Lakshmi beseechingly.

He could say no more. His feelings choked him. He rushed out of the house as one possessed.

5

Lakshmi was stunned by the stroke. Her husband was gone, but surely his gentler feelings would return. It was so unlike him. Gentle natures like his seldom take offence, but when once they receive a wound it seldom healed likewise. But what had she done to deserve this ? Ah yes, that cursed necklace ! Surely there was no harm to keep it safe for her cousin till he would go back, when she would return it to him. And could this be so great an offence then ? No, no, there must have been something more at the bottom of all this. If her husband should not come back ? Was her life then worthliving for one moment ? But then her child? Yes, she must live for her darling son. Thus tortured by conflicting thoughts she sat down by the side of her child, who now with a smile on his lips slept the sleep of childhood unconscious of the bitter woes of its mother. Who can fathom the meaning of those smiles which now and then light up the faces of children in their soft hours of slumber ?

Days thus passed by in sorrow and hope. There were no visitors to the house save Varada Sastri's agent, who, with true delicacy, rarely intruded on

her, and only called once in a few days to inquire what she wanted. She was thus generally left alone with her sorrow. •

One day there was a tap at the door. Thump went her heart at the knock. She opened the door with trembling fingers and met her cousin Venugopan.

Having set the mischief at work, he had left without taking leave and now came to complete the work he had begun. With an air of sincere sorrow at her loneliness he ventured to offer her his sympathy, and the shelter of his house. She thanked him for it, blamed herself for what had happened. She went inside, brought the necklace and gave it back to him, saying: ' Here, cousin, take it and return home. It has been at the bottom of all the mischief. I am now a lonely woman and it will not look well if you stay here for ever so short a time.'

Venu was not prepared for the turn things had taken. His passion bursting all bounds of prudence, he said, ' You shall henceforth rest under my roof, and I shall be your slave.'

From all gentleness she instantly turned into a fury, her whole frame trembling with indignation. She drew herself up, raised aloft her right arm, and pointing to the door said, ' You wretch, be off. Stay here but a minute more, and your villainy shall be exposed.'

He saw that she would do as she threatened. So he thought it best to retreat, but as he did so, he fixed on her a look in which was concentrated all the fury of his baffled passion, and said: 'Your husband has already paid dearly for having crossed my path, and mind, you shall not go cheaply off for this insolence ?' And he was gone.

6

Five years had passed. Those were weary years for Lakshmi. Her child had grown into a handsome boy of seven and had been put to school a year or two. His sweet disposition and winning manners made him a general favourite.

One evening on return from school he went to his mother, who, as usual, passed her fingers lightly through his exuberant hair, kissed him, and asked him how he had fared at school. He replied that he had done well, and said, 'I have something to ask you, mother. Mani's father has brought a beautiful cloth for him, a very nice one. Where's my father?'

This question called forth a flood of painful recollections in the mother's mind. Hastily wiping off the tears from her eyes, she said, ' Dear Balu, it's five years since your father went away. He parted from me in anger. Let us pray to God for his return.' The child closed its eyes and said in simple heartfelt words, 'God, restore my father to me. I want him so much.'

One evening Balu returned from school with a flushed countenance. His heart beat fast, his eyes were red and swollen ; there was fever in the pulse.

' What's the matter with you, child? You don't seem to be quite well,' said Lakshmi in an anxious tone.

' I do not know what ails me, *amma*, my head aches so. I fear I've fever, and I feel thirsty.'

Lakshmi instantly put him to bed. She sat by his side and felt his temples. They were throbbing. 'What shall I do? what shall I do ?' moaned the mother. She never left his side the whole night. If he clenched his teeth in the heat of fever, she called him by his name, and asked what ailed him, but she had no reply. He tossed about uneasily in his bed.

In the morning the servant was sent to fetch the village physician. He came ; took the boy by the wrist, felt and looked grave. Lakshmi, who was watching him all the while in suspense asked him to tell her the worst.

' The *vata* and *pitta* pulses have effected a junction ; it's a bad symptom. But with God's grace worse cases have pulled through with the aid of my pills.' So saying he untied his medicine pouch, took therefrom a pill of the size of a pea and squeezing it to powder mixed it with a little honey. Uttering the name of the Almighty, he gave it to the boy to swallow. He left two more pills with the mother bidding her to give the boy one at noon and one in the

evening, and told her he would call at sunset.

By evening Balu grew worse. His mind began to wander.

'*Amma*,' said he, 'I feel as if I were going away to a better world. There is such sweet music ringing in my ears.'

The mother was alarmed. She feared his mind was once more wandering, but the boy continued with logical sequence:

'Perhaps it is angels singing, angels that may have been sent to take me to God. Have you not told me, *amma*, that there are young boys like me there, always happy, always singing the praise of God? I should like to go there. Will you go with me? I would feel so lonely there without you.'

7

There is no unmixed evil under the sun. The sight of such deep sorrow as that of Lakshmi seldom fails to touch the hardest of hearts, and men who have never known what it is to feel for followmen unconsciously open their minds on such occasions to gentler influences. Ramu was one of those who were deeply impressed by this calamity. He was more thoughtless than really wicked, and when he consented to play the part he played, he did not dream that things would go so far. In a penitent mood he blamed himself for all that had happened and swore within himself to repair, as far as he could, the mischief he had done.

What shall we say of Lakshmi's sorrow? The last link that had bound her

'So kiss me and let me go.'

He closed his eyes, the effort was too much for him.

'*Amma*,' he once again continued, 'look here, don't you see a boy? What a sweet smile he smiles. He is calling me. Shall I go? Wait here till *appa* comes home and then bring him to me. Kiss me, *amma*, don't take on so. There again, don't you see that lovely boy? He is in such a hurry. So kiss me and let me go.'

Lakshmi stared round but saw none. She kissed her boy and hugged him to her breast with desperate vehemence, as if she could thereby save her darling, but even as she did so, his soul had quietly winged its heavenward flight.

to earth seemed to have snapped asunder. The severe strain on her nerves resulted in fever and for many days she lay betwixt life and death. She slowly recovered. Grief for her lost son was still strong in her but it was subdued. She would talk of him as if he were alive. She would dust and air his clothes and carefully stow them away in the wardrobe. She would look at his toys and kiss them as if they were himself. So hours would glide by in this silent communion between the dead and the living. But whenever she thought of her husband she melted into tears.

8

It was a fine April morning in the beautiful village on the banks of the Cauvery. The golden rays of the sun gilded the tops of the verdant groves that fringed the banks of the sacred stream. Adjoining the bathing *ghat* was a long tiled shed open on one side, in which was assembled almost all the elderly population of the village, to listen with rapt attention to the words that fell from the lips of a Sastri. The Sastri was seated on a plank in the centre and was speaking on religion and philosophy. Another who was seated by him, now and then, read out a few verses from a manuscript of cadjan leaves before him, and the Sastri, taking them for his text, poured out his soul in words of thrilling eloquence, and his audience were swayed as they had never been before. There was a tinge of sadness in his face that harmonised well with his words, when lifting high his pensive eyes he spoke to them of the vanity of human joys. The lecture for the day in question was over by ten o'clock and his audience dispersed severally, save one or two who lingered behind to take the learned man to dinner.

Varada Sastri, ever since he turned his back on his home, was thus going about from village to village, sowing seeds of wisdom. Yet in the midst of all these adulations he was not happy. He was about to follow his host for the day, when Ramu stepped in front of him, and begged for a short interview. The sight of one who belonged to his native village stirred up strange emotions in his breast.

'Ah,' is it you, Ramu?' he said, 'I hope you do well.'

'Thank you,' replied Ramu, 'I'm well. But I do not deserve these kind words from you. I have done you nothing but injury and you speak to me as to a friend!'

'Whatever you may have done, you feel sorry for it now. That is the best amends you can make. But will you let me know what you want? You seemed to have something particular to talk to me about.'

'I have bad news for you, Sir, but let me first of all tell you, you did wrong in having so hastily left your wife. She is innocent. She is an angel, and I purposely vilified her in your presence, instigated by Venu who paid me to talk the scandal. She has suffered enough, more than one can bear. Your child is dead, the child that sustained her in your absence.'

With a beating heart Varada Sastri now heard everything. He did not feel the death of the son so much, not having lived at home long enough to have loved him. But he deeply felt for his wife. He could understand how much she must have suffered.

'Ramu,' he said, 'I'm eternally grateful to you. Few would have thus come forward to accuse themselves. Will you tell me what the people thought of my sudden disappearance?'

'What could they think of it? It was a mystery they could not solve.'

'Ramu, I thank you once again. But will you do me a favour? Will you promise that the secret shall live and die with us? Will you also manage to tie the tongues of Venu and that other accomplice of yours?'

'Nothing is easier,' Ramu replied. 'Self-interest, if nothing else, will keep me from giving out my share in the base plot. As for my accomplice, he has died a victim to his excesses. Venu has turned mad. He had lent a very large sum of money to one who became bankrupt, and Venu is now a maniac. He rarely talks. When he talks, it's only about his money. So your secret is safe.'

Thus assured Varada Sastri hastened home. Silent was the re-union of the parted pair; and as their moist eyes met each seemed to see in the other's a world of tenderness and beatitude. At last Lakshmi said: 'Our boy is dead, and with his last words bade me take you to him. You have come, my lord, and I feel as if our child is restored to us.'

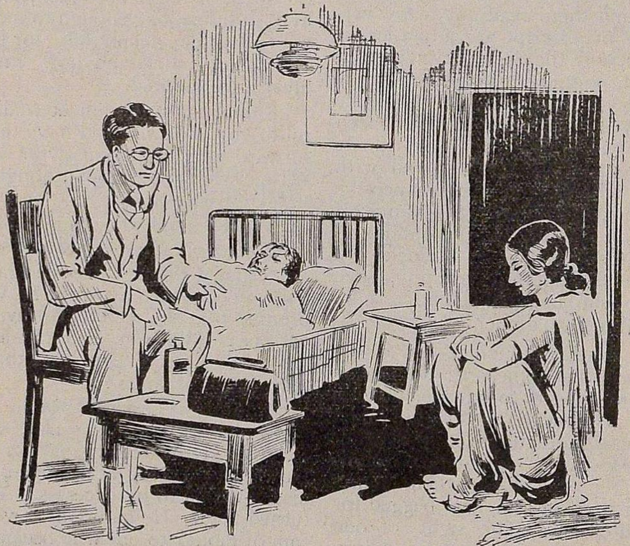
A RAY OF SUNSHINE

By P. S. NATARAJA SARMA

THE doctor shook his head as he put down the rigid hand of his patient.

'I have played the role of medical man till now,' he said with an unprofessional quiver in his voice, 'it's time I played a different role.'

It was a terrible verdict. And the spacious parlour, the kerosene lamp in the centre with its ponderous dome, the sinking figure on the cot and the late hour of night when the very silence came as an oppressive intrusion conspired to enhance its deadly effect.



'He might hold out for a day or two, but not more.'

Jaya listened to him without a word. A permanent melancholy had left its stamp on her fair young face and her frail figure. Her head was hung down and she sat with her hands crossed on her lap. She made no movement either of pain or of surprise.

'You must be prepared for the worst,' the doctor went on in the most awful bedside manner at his command. 'He might hold out for a day or two, but not more.'

But that deadly effect was lost on Jaya. She lived only in part to what went on around her. She raised her big, dark eyes in a vacant stare at the doctor.

'You must excuse me, doctor,' she said without any trace of tremor in her voice. 'I must have given you the idea of an undutiful wife—in fact, I am one.'

The doctor moved restlessly in his seat. He was evidently a man who

hated sentiment; and he had a funny desire to be somewhere else.

'This does not come as a shock to me,' she continued. 'I have anticipated it these six years. I anticipated it on the day of my marriage—the day my father made me over to this septuagenarian money-bag.'

She was very bitter now; bitter against all humanity; bitter against fate. She had no sympathy for the life that was ebbing away at her side. She thought only of herself; and there was enough and more than enough to think of that way.

The doctor rose from his chair. He was himself again.

'Half an ounce every three hours. After food. Bran poultice at twelve'—all this to the Anglo-Indian nurse in attendance.

'I shall call to-morrow morning. Don't worry too much. Good night.'

That night Jaya never slept. She lay awake in bed and mused on the days that were gone from her and on the life that *might* have been hers. How cruel had fate been to her! She thought the little girl she had been at fourteen, free as the upcountry air and gay as the upcountry brook—with her parents and her friends and her sports and all that was best and beautiful in Nature around her. And now from that sprightly frivolity of four and ten, scarcely on the threshold of her womanhood and in the hey-day of her grace, Fate was forcing her down to the nethermost depths of desolation; and the future yawned before her—blank, blank, infernally blank.

The next morning had an agreeable surprise for Jaya.

She had a visitor. It was Raghunathan, a young man from her village. He was one of those young men who take their degree as a matter of course and then realize to their cost that it leads nowhere.

Jaya felt something of a thrill at sight of Raghunathan for he brought with him not only himself but such sweet associations of home and of a life that was never to be.

'I am so glad you have come, Raghu', she said gently, trembling with delight. 'You don't know how tiring life has been here.'

'I am on my way to Madras and I came to see you . . . I heard your husband is ill.'

'You mean the old man. He is terribly ill.'

Raghu was restless from the first.

'Jaya, Jaya,' all his affected composure giving way, 'let me be frank with you for once. It was all so cruel—so heartless—I mean, what your father did. This old man for your husband! I couldn't have imagined it. Parents or no, it was downright cruel—it was callous, I would rather let society go———'

He stopped for he saw that Jaya was weeping.

'Raghu, my dear Raghu,' she said with emotion, 'for Heaven's sake don't talk that way. It's all so painful. Let us talk of other things . . . By the way,' she made an ineffectual attempt at pleasantry, 'are you married?'

'No.'

'Don't worry, I shall find a match for you. Then, have you got a job?'

'No.'

'But you are a first class man, aren't you?'

'Yes, but that doesn't mend matters. If I had a lot of cash and went abroad or tipped the tin-gods that might come in handy—but it's a big "if".'

They were silent for a while. When the heart is full words fail; and their hearts were full with the reminiscences of former times. Their memory strode back to the days when without distinction of birth or age they had gambolled and sported on the street. They had dreamed their little dreams then and how different was the reality now!

Raghunathan perceived a tear in Jaya's eye. It was with great strain that he himself stifled a sigh that rose to his throat.

'I never imagined such a life for you, Jaya,' he said at length. 'Of course we all have our bitter share of ills. But yours—it is scarcely credible.'

'Why, what's wrong with me now?' she returned with a hollow laugh that had no life in it. 'I have got a big house, plenty of money, servants, and jewels that could do justice to a goddess. Isn't that enough for a schoolmaster's daughter? Sometimes I almost feel I am an ungrateful grumbler. There are lots of girls who would die of delight with all that at their feet.'

Raghu bit his lips hard.

'Does all that make up life?'

He was saying it half to himself.

'I wonder,' he mused.

Jaya sighed.

'Does all that make up life?' She asked herself and sighed again.

'How are your people at home, Raghu?' she tried to steer ahead of uneasy topics. 'And how is Leela? Poor dear, it is long since I saw her. She was quite a girl when I left.'

'Ah, don't talk of her. It makes my heart bleed. You know what I used to say about her in the good old days—that she wouldn't be a drudge in the kitchen, but go to college and graduate and make a coup in the world. And now, well, she is on the marriage market.'

'There seems to be nothing but ill-luck in the air. Especially for us girls. It makes you almost tire of life. And how's your mother?'

Raghunathan rose from his seat.

'It's the same story over again. I shall tell you all about how we are at present. No lies and no eyewashes. Father has got the sack and is staying at home. Mother may break down any day, she is so bad in health. Leela must be married—and God knows where the money is coming from. Even the little ones have caught the infection and brood on the playground. The last movable in the house has gone to the pawn-broker's. And I am rotting.'

Raghu turned away and fixed his gaze upon the door knob. Jaya could not see his face; otherwise she would have found something therein that cut into her heart-strings.

It was a sad story even as such. East, west, north, and south—wherever you turned to you saw nothing but Misfortune dark as night. The harrowing picture made an indelible impression on her mind. The idea of little Leela—cheery, laughing little Leela—staggering underneath the scorn of society, of her little brothers turned premature pessimists—it was all so heart-rending.

'Is there no help for it all?' the question came without her knowledge.

'Not from you anyway. Of course there are jobs awaiting you round the corner if you could shell out a couple of thousands as *baksheesh*, you know . . . 'But it's time I was going. Why should I tire you with my worries? You have got enough of your own. Why —'

He stopped dead. And a lot of things happened in simultaneous confusion. An unearthly groan came from the sick-chamber and close upon it the terrified face of a nurse appeared at the window. Jaya made a stride inside—all in a flutter.

And then somehow a sort of dimness cama over her. The spacious chamber, the figure on the cot, the nurse, and Raghu—all faded from her vision. And in their stead a haunting, confused picture followed her—of people in dress; of a little girl in a dirty *pavadai* who hung down her head lest her lips should break into a laugh; of children in rags and wails and groans and a sick atmosphere; and of a young man who shadowed it all with a grim, helpless look on his hard-lined face . . .

She returned after a while. Her hair had fallen dishevelled over her shoulder. Her face was pale and livid, but she was calm, unperturbed.

'My husband is dead. I am a widow. That is all.'

And in her mind something else came uppermost: 'If I could shell out a couple of thousands!'

Three days later.

A fair young lady in a plain drab saree, her wrists and neck bare of ornaments and her hair tied up into a confused knot, got down from the train at P—, and taking up a suit-case in

her hand and directing a few others behind her, called for a rick.

It was Jaya.

The black news had gone before her. The village matrons were surprised when they saw her riding home—and they were surprised for more reasons than one.

They had been looking for a thin, spent-up chip of a woman, with swollen eyes and downcast face, and a lot of dirty bags and bundles at her heels. But here was a young girl with a pleasant face and, save for one or two particularities, she might have been on her way to a wedding.

Her parents received her in silence. But the little ones flocked round her and were ready with their caresses. And wonder of wonders! She smiled a melancholy smile on them, petted and fondled them and gave them presents.

They went over her things the next day. At the end of the search her aunt —her father's toothless elder sister— threw up her hands and half-screamed.

'Where are your jewels, my dear? The old one showered gold and diamond on you--didn't he? And where are they gone now?'

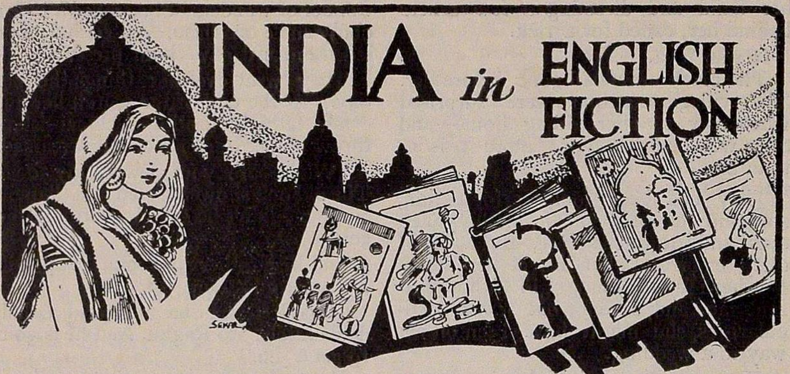
And her father and mother put her the same question.

'I gave them,' she answered calmly, deliberately, 'to Raghu. And he is going to get a job.'

Her aunt went down with a yell.

And there was a fraction of a gleam in Jaya's eye.

The world is a vast and ghastly intricacy of mechanism and one has to be very wary not to get mangled by it.—D. H. LAWRENCE



'The influence of India on English literature has been no small one: few indeed have grasped its content or its range . . . English prose and poetry are flavoured with the essence of the perceptions and imaginations of the thoughts and feelings which came to them as they looked on that vast varied empire, changing yet unchanged, between Calcutta and Karachi, between Peshawar and Pondicherry. The essence has given satisfaction to an instinctive appetite of mind and heart which is more than a mere craving for the exotic . . . Its very name echoes the name, as it suggests the power of earth's Eternal City. We know it as Romance.'

[*India in English Literature.*—Robert Sencourt]

'" They tell me, Mr Thompson, that you have published a book entitled *A Farewell to India* ?"

" That is so, Mahatmaji."

" Well, it seems to me that you have been wasting your time again. How do you think that you are ever going to say farewell to India ? You are India's prisoner." '

MR Thompson in the above bit of colloquy is Edward Thompson, poet and novelist, at present lecturer in Bengali at Oxford. For twelve years until 1922 he was an educational missionary in Bengal. During the War he served in Mesopotamia.

Mr Thompson's love for India is characterised by the quality of 'restless adventure of imagination,' and as one intensely interested in her art and letters he is, what Mr Gandhi said of him, a prisoner of India. And Mr Thompson has shown that he is, by writing *So A Poor Ghost** after *A Farewell to India.*

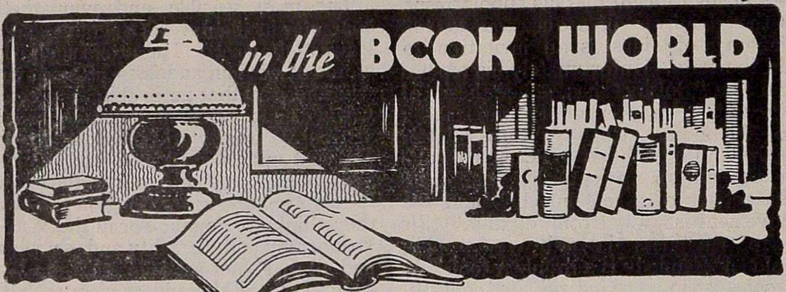
So A Poor Ghost begins with a dissertation on the Poet Kalidasa and Mr Thompson knows his Kalidasa well. Such a beginning is adopted because there is "hardly a clear-cut issue in sight"—the generation which fought the war has survived to see its hopes for the betterment of the world smothered by the rank after-grass of war—and the vagueness of the issue makes the author live in a world of ideas instead of incidents. A good part of the story is told in retrospect and it is only at the end of the book do the loose strands weave themselves into a coherent pattern. The story proper opens with Philip Rattray's return to India for the second time. While in England Rattray is topful of schemes for the regeneration of India, is sure of the power of the pen as an instrument of reformation (after resigning his majorship he was for some years a writer of novels and contributor to several English newspapers), and is

*Macmillan, London, 7s. 6d.

bold in his thought that his appointment as the Minister of Education to the Maharaja of Giansi is an invitation to run the State. Unfortunately his reputation as a "Bolshy" has gone ahead of him and he is prevented from taking up the post. Rattray turns bitter against life and his bitterness results in the author caricaturing the other characters of the novel, "and the movement is away from dignity." Sir John Chalmers is a heavy stupid; Colonel Kennedy is a drunken fool. As a contrast to these individuated characters we have in the Maharana of Rayalgarah, a picture of the completely Anglicized Indian. To him his people are no better than "slaves and donkeys fit only to carry burdens and to do what they are told"; ay, the beasts were comparatively better for they kept his woods and fields clean. But the Maharana, when roused, can be equally nasty at the expense at the British Raj: "You do the deeds of demons, and then, when the fit has passed, you say to those you have humbled, Come! It is all over and can be forgotten! Let us settle down to this wonderful British Raj of peace and security where we guard you and set you an example of sportmanship and good humour! . . . . The whole world must be kept from the danger of Bolshevism and Communism, and all these other bad thoughts and bad plans of people who have not been trained in the English public schools and do not understand how 'to play the game!' To play the game! To play the game!" he repeated, as if beside himself with passion. "That is what we all have to do—to play the game! So it is important to send us for rulers men who have never progressed—no, not one step—beyond the ideas that they had in their school days! 'You and I are colleagues in a great game,' says His Excellency This. 'You and I, Maharana, have to bat on a very sticky wicket,' says His Excellency That 'I do not care tuppence who makes the runs, so long as we all manage to make plenty,' says another Excellency.

The most sensible and sympathetic character in the novel is the old General, Fawcett-Fawcett. He utters such ripe words of wisdom and is so pleased with what he says that he is able to create a world at once brave and luminous. He attributes the world muddle to the fact that middle-aged men and women are running or trying to run the show: "They are trying to bring in the ideas they think we fought for in the War—Democracy and Equality and socialism and all that—not realizin' that the War showed that all these ideas were *rubbish*! Italy's the first country to have the sense to see it; they have a got a dictator and they never have any nonsense of strikes or Labour Governments, as we do." He is emphatic that his own generation is untroubled by goblins; the younger people too are out to have a good time: 'My dear Rattray, it isn't my old generation or the very aoung generation that's at fault. It's yours. We old fellows trained the men who won the War. That's something. You may think young Tom and Enid frivolous blighters. They're young; they're in love; they're full of high spirits, happiness, hope. It's your generation, with its eternal introspection and defeatism that's the blight."

It is when expressing such conflicting opinions through the different characters in the novel that Mr Thompson is confusing himself. We do not quite understand his political philosophy; at one moment he is with the most progressive radicals, at another he is prepared to die in the ditch with the good old soldier who had been a dashing blade when Roberts of Kandahar was Commander-in-Chief in India. Aside from this which is pure politics, judging him from the purely artistic, high praise must be given; his word-pictures of Indian scenery are inexhaustibly lovely; they have the glitter of a clump of stars or the sheen of a carpet of diamonds and reveal the Indian texture of his mind. *So A Poor Ghost* is at bottom a sad book, and so a sweet one, and one feels after reading the noble exaltation of it all.



INDO-ENGLISH

Kandan, The Patriot, by K. S. Venkataramani (Svetaranya Ashrama, Mylapore, Madras. Second Edition: Revised and Enlarged. Rs. *2*.)

KANDAN THE PATRIOT is the best novel of Indian life, except for Mr E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Mr Forster writes with iridescent irony and is delightfully exuberant in pungent caricature and extravagant imagery; Mr Venkataramani writes in the spirit of comedy and with emotional reserve. Both have penetrating philosophic insight and are deft in the dissection of character; but while Mr Forster reveals character in paragraphs and elongated incidents Mr Venkataramani betrays it in a sentence or sometimes in a simile. The novels written by Indian writers wholly lack in creative intention and power and can be regarded only as exercises or timid social propaganda; and where creation takes the place of mere craftsmanship, as in Tagore, the structure does not rest on the fusion of matter and style but solely on the matter which floats like an insoluble mass, and dull and drab persons seem to come and do nothing before dull and drab backgrounds. Mr Venkataramani is free from the half-heartedness and diffidence of his Indo-Anglian contemporaries; he has taken pains to perfect his art. The characters in this novel range from disgruntled civilians to discontented mobs; the descriptions run with smoothness and verve; the construction of the plot is complex and on the whole successful and moves on to a thundering climax; and the dialogue varies from delicious chatting to riotous oratory. The addition of Raghu and his family, in the Enlarged Edition, is a pure gain, while Padma is a masterpiece in Mr Venkataramani's portrait gallery. In the original, Sarasvati was a shrew tamed rather suddenly to national service; in the new edition she shines with better grace and her translation from a stationmaster's shrewish wife into a fervent patriot is inevitable and inspiring, though in the process Sundaram loses his charm and forfeits our affection. The other characters register neither profit nor loss.

Mr Venkataramani gains and suffers from his technique, which is highly original and peculiar. His style may be compared with that of Charles Morgan, H. M. Tomlinson, E. M. Forster, or Major Yeats-Brown, for the simplicity of its tone and figures of speech, and its restrained imaginative splendour. But he must stand or fall by his own individuality. Mother English is fertile of metaphors but Mr Venkataramani is stark naked of them; he relies mainly on the grandeur of his philosophy and the glamour of his similes. His similes have a glow-worm-like quality: they light up the whole story with their brilliant flashes; and they help him in the constant illumination of character and incident, which is his primary characteristic. The normal novelist would use dialogue to reveal personality by the

individuality of tone or diction adopted by each character, but Mr Venkataramani makes the speeches either dreamy monologues or meditative soliloquies, all in his own flowery style, and to a certain extent suffers from this self-imposed handicap. His characters all talk alike. While we are not familiar with their physical features we are keenly alive to their sensitive psychic personalities.

This edition is not free from misprints and rhetorical disasters; the punctuation should have been organised better; the revision is more apparent than real; and if he had struck off half-a-dozen soporific epithets his writing would have been triumphant throughout. But everything is redeemed by the meditative philosophy which pulsates to the end but does not obtrude, the patriotism which speaks in undertones but not with trumpets, the sweetness and light which illumine the book with a certain beatitude, the strength and beauty of style, and the half-dreamy half-sensuous prose which is made of the stuff of which poetry is made.

M. CHALAPATHI RAU.

Kettle Drums, by N. Ramabhadran, B.A. (The Basel Mission Press, Mangalore, S. K. Re. 1 net.)

THIS little book is a miscellany of short stories, sketches of South Indian life, and an essay on " Cruelty to Animals". The stories and sketches are delightful reading. The author has a keen insight into South Indian life in its varied aspects, and has succeeded in making an excellent use of this knowledge in his stories and sketches. Although " The Village Headman," " The Village Accountant," and " The Village Schoolmaster " are themes already handled by others, Mr. Ramabhadran's account of them besides being faithful to the originals are interesting. His sense of humour is characteristic and is evident from the description of the village schoolmaster expounding the phenomenon of the solar eclipse as the devouring of the orbit of the sun by the mythological serpent Rahu, or in the account of Krishnappa ' ever looking out for rectangular crevices in the walls ' or again in the paragraph dealing with the obstinate water-tap refusing water for the tramp's bath on his arrival at Madras. " The Rounding up of a Robin Hood" and "How The Pay Was Earned" are short stories well told.

Mr Ramabhadran's style is simple and his English correct. He has succeeded in making a workman-like use of words. The book is well got up. It is therefore a pity that a few illspelt words like " mustaches " have been allowed to remain, which, it is hoped, will disappear in the next edition.

M. A. PARASURAMAN.

ENGLISH

The Woman Who Had Imagination, by H. E. Bates (Jonathan Cape, London, 7s. 6d.)

WRITE out a story; chop off the former half of it, and the latter half will make a good story: this was Tchehov's dictum with regard to the short story. Beauty is born out of the elimination of all superfluities; form and compactness; and Tchehov achieved these in the short story by exploiting a facet of character or a psychological situation. When the mind is chokeful of ideas it breaks into exuberance; beneath these ideas there is one idea persistent which gets crystallised when the exuberance slowly exhausts itself. Hence Tchehov's advice to cut off the former half of a story where all diffusiveness ends. Mr Bates's debt to Tchehov is obvious. While keeping his own emotions in perfect control he expresses a mood with such astonishing clarity and fine sensibility that all the details he uses to set the scene relevant to and revealing of the mood live vitally, vividly, yet tenderly in his words which have the shine of the stars but not their sterility. The best stories in the collection are "The Lily," "The Gleaner," and "The Waterfall". They possess an undying enchantment and drench the mind as with wine of grapes fresh from the vine. "My great-uncle Silas" is a remarkable creation of Mr Bates's genius; the wicked

gay old devil reminds me of Hardy's whimsical Uncle Benjy in *The Trumpet Major*. Fortunately Uncle Silas is still with us and we eagerly hope with Mr. David Garnett "for more blossoms on the lime next year and more still the year after."

Fiddler of Lourdes, & Other Vagabond Tales, by John Gibbons (Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London. 3s. 6d.)

To us in India, John Gibbons is a new name in the world of story-writers which include A.E. Coppard, H.E. Bates, L. A. G. Strong, James Joyce, Martin Armstrong, and numerous others. The publisher's blurb on the dust jacket runs thus : "Mr Gibbons has continued to extend the wide public and the literary reputation which he won immediately by his famous pilgrimage book *Tramping to Lourdes*. He has become a deservedly popular writer of short sketches and stories in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic." Stories in the present collection, however, are empty of technical skill ; they are written in tolerable workaday prose and are no disgrace to a library of vagabond tales, if such a library does exist. Mr Gibbons has a sense of humour but very often it is dull ; it tries to sparkle but the lead in it permits very little sparkling. Just an instance from the "Brave Music of a Distant Drum" in which he describes the Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931 : "And in fact the popular souvenir there is a small model of Mr. Gandhi, cunningly fitted up in his internals for use as a salt-cellar. And when I had thought it carefully over, I was going to have bought one and broken it. Except that I should have to have bought up several million of the models. It was exactly as if the French were saying : 'Look at the English and their India, and now look at; Our Empire'." Mr Gandhi can be sure of his immortality through his breaking of the Salt Law if not for anything else. *Fiddler of Lourdes* shows its author as a vagabond, but he hasn't the vivacity which is the very spirit of vagabondage.

M. S. I.

Oh, never star
Was lost here, but it rose afar !
Look East, where whole new thousands are !
In Vishnu-land what Avatar ?

Waring.—Browning.